Homogenized Workers?

1. Collins Street 5 pm. John Brack, 1955
   National Gallery of Victoria.
Uniformity and Diversity:
A Case Study of Female Shop and Office Workers in Victoria, 1880 to 1939

by
Melanie Nolan

A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
of The Australian National University

September 1989
Declaration

Except where otherwise indicated,
this thesis is my own work

Melanie Nolan
September 1989
Contents

Contents
List of Illustrations
List of Tables and Graphs
Abbreviations
Acknowledgements
Abstract

Introduction
Australian historiographical context
International historiography: testing its conclusions

Chapter One: The History of the Sexual Division of Retail and Clerical Labour Trapped Between Two Approaches
1.1 Retail and clerical labour histories and labour market models
   Workplace rationalization approach
   Gender approach
   Segmental approach
1.2 Conclusion: a theme for liberating a Victorian case study

Chapter Two: "What Shall We Do With Our [Educated Middle Class] Girls" in Victoria in the 1880s?
2.1 Women's entry into paid shop and office work
2.2 Shop and office for some women
   Employment patterns among women change
   Younger, single, middle class and educated women knock on doors
   Revolutionary change?
2.3 Whatever happened to men's jobs?
   Jobs for the boys
   Extent of dual labour market
2.4 Conclusion: women's paid employment only at the margins

Chapter Three: A Paradise Lost? Hosts of Youths, 1890 to 1907
3.1 Growing "hosts" of youths 1890 to 1907: heroic and anti-heroic interpretations of change
3.2 State regulates women shop and office workers?
   Government as employer
   Government as legislator: protective labour legislation
3.3 Oversupply of untrained girls?
   Young and skilled women?
3.4 Displacement of well-paid males?
   Older men and the professionalization movement
3.5 Conclusion: a workforce dividing by sex and age by 1907

Chapter Four: Unions and Divisions; The Case of Equal Pay for Shop and Office Workers, 1908 to 1922
4.1 Male and female compacts?
4.2 Workers divided by arbitration
   Shop Assistants' and Clerks' Unions support pay uniformity
   Equal pay and trade union solidarity?
4.3 VCU and its equal pay campaign 1911 to 1922
   Union leadership and rank and file
List of Illustrations with Acknowledgements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Illustration</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Collins Street 5 pm, John Brack, 1955</td>
<td>frontispiece</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. &amp; 3.</td>
<td>Crammond and Dickson Staff, Warrnambool, 1890 and 1920</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Victorian Railways, Engineer-in-Chief's Staff, 1862</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Victorian Railways, Women Sitting Tests for Vacancies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Seth Rodolphus Clark's Shop, c.1885</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Melbourne Women Telephonists Australasian Sketcher, 1881, Telecom Reprographics Bureau</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Daisy Webster's Merit Certificate, 1901</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Telephone Classes, 1907 Telecom Reprographics Bureau</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Stott and Hoare's Business College, Students in the Foyer, 1907 Mr and Mrs Cahill, Stott and Hoare proprietors, Melbourne</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. &amp; 13.</td>
<td>George and George's Female and Male Staff, 1898</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.</td>
<td>Clerks' Wages Board Cartoon, n.d. c.1912 Victorian Clerks' Union papers, SLV</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Eleanor Cameron, Secretary Women's Typist Association, 1911 Woman, 1 March 1911, SLV</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.</td>
<td>Delegates, Trades Hall Council's Conference on Women, 1912 Labor Call, 24 October 1912, NLA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.</td>
<td>Zercho's Business College, 1916 Zercho's Collection, UOMA</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.</td>
<td>'Girls at Work and Play', 1925 Essendon School Magazine, 1925, p. 23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.</td>
<td>Boys Typing, Stott and Hoare's Business College, 1907 Mr and Mrs Cahill, Stott and Hoare proprietors, Melbourne</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>Colesanco, Special Study Number, June 1928 Coles Myer Archives, Melbourne</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>Myer Emporium Ltd., Accounts Department, 1920s Myer's Scrapbook, UOMA</td>
<td>224</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>Gibsonia Woollen Mills, Engineer's Workshop Office, 1922 UOMA</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>Commonwealth Bank, Accounts Machines, 1926 Bank Notes, October 1926, SLV</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
29. Myer Emporium Ltd., Shop Assistants with Cash Register, 1920s
   Myer's Scrapbook, UOMA
30. Adeline Keating, Myer Emporium Ltd., Toy Buyer, 1920
   Joan Hellegers, Melbourne
List of Tables, Graphs and Figures

Table 2-1: Feminization of Selected Shop and Office Occupations by %, Victoria, 1871-1891   page 35
Table 3-1: Distribution of Salary Groups in a Department Store by %, Melbourne, 1890, 1895, 1900 111
Table 3-2: Age-Earning Profiles: Public Service and Insurance Clerks, Victoria, 1911/10 115
Graph 3-1: Paterson, Laing and Bruce Staff, Melbourne, 1876-1907 123
Table 4-1: Extent of Victorian Wages Boards, 1901-1933 142
Graph 5-1: Victorian Public Service Staff, Temporary and Permanent, 1890-1930 184
Table 5-1: Victorian Retail Shop Assistants, 1915-1939 187
Table 5-2: Sexual Division, National Bank of Australasia, Victorian Branches, 1922-39 189
Graph 5-2: Bank of Australasia Staff, Average Staff Salaries Compared to the Number of Female Staff, Victoria, 1889-1930 190
Figure 5-1: School Structure under the 1910 Victorian Education Act 192
Table 5-3: Official Statistics on the Destinations of State Secondary School Pupils by %, Victoria, 1923-1939 196
Graph 6-1: Importation of Typewriters by £-value, Australia, 1904-39 234
Graph 6-2: Importation of Office Machines to Victoria by Unit Numbers, 1931-39 235
Graph 6-3: Retail Labour in Victorian Shops, 1930-39 248
Graph 6-4: Employment in Sample of Victorian Shops, July 1933-March 1940 271
Table 6-1: Age Structure of Banking Staff, Australia, 1921-47 274
Graph 7-1: Victorian Company Registrations, 1864-1955 279
Table 7-1: Feminization of Retail and Clerical sectors by %, Victoria, 1881-1933 288
Table 7-2: Age Structure of Commerce by %, Victoria, 1901-1954 291
Table 7-3: Comparative Feminization Estimates, 1891-1931 298
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABL</td>
<td>Archives of Business and Labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACA</td>
<td>Accountants' and Clerks' Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALR</td>
<td>Argus Law Reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANL</td>
<td>Australian National Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANU</td>
<td>Australian National University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APP</td>
<td>Australian Parliamentary Papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASL</td>
<td>Anti-Sweating League</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAR</td>
<td>Commonwealth Arbitration Reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIA</td>
<td>Court of Industrial Appeals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CIF(R)</td>
<td>Chief Inspector of Factories and Shops (Report)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GU</td>
<td>Grocer's Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUA</td>
<td>Melbourne University Archives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MBW</td>
<td>Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW</td>
<td>New South Wales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLC</td>
<td>Presbyterian Ladies' College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>Public Records Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSSS</td>
<td>Research School of Social Sciences, ANU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAU</td>
<td>Shop Assistants' Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLV</td>
<td>State Library of Victoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VCU</td>
<td>Victorian Clerks' Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VPD</td>
<td>Victorian Parliamentary Debates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VPP</td>
<td>Victorian Parliamentary Papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VTHC</td>
<td>Victorian Trades Hall Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VYB</td>
<td>Victorian Year Book</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements

Like any thesis writer, I have become indebted to many institutions and people in the course of my research and writing. Above all, I gratefully acknowledge the funding I received under an Australian National University scholarship. Just after I got off the plane from New Zealand, Jenny Lee helped me to find a viable thesis topic and my way around Melbourne archives. The assistance I received from archival staff was vital to my research, especially at the State Library of Victoria, National Library of Australia, Public Records Office (Victoria), Melbourne University Archives, and the Archives of Business and Labour. Many of those responsible for records held by Melbourne's businesses and schools which I used were not archivists but they could not have been more helpful.

I thank the 97 women who gave me their work histories. I contacted some of these women through Ros Byrne who generously allowed me access to the 200 written responses and taped interviews she collected when researching aspects of secretarial work before 1939. The work histories proved to be my most valuable source, although many of the women doubted anything they "could contribute could possibly be of much use" to me. In this regard, I am obliged to the daughters and friends who urged women to respond to my advertisements. I collected the work histories at the beginning of my research: they were my inspiration.

The help I had in writing was most important. I was fortunate to have John Merritt as my supervisor. His advice was always tendered considerately and skilfully; it was always judicious. Helen Tudehope challenged my ideas and encouraged me in the early stages. I benefitted from comments by Kim Sterelny and Chris Connolly on drafts near the end and their exhortations on clarity.

I owe a special debt of gratitude to my 'support team', the friends and family in Australia and New Zealand who sustained me. Chris and Geralyn Nolan provided me with a home in Melbourne whenever I wanted it, with help from Maureen and John Gleeson. Kim Sterelny and Alison Watts, my mother, between them helped me to get a computer, gave me a printer and kept me and it 'running'.
Abstract

Paid shop and office work in Victoria feminized between 1880 and 1939. The majority of workers were men in 1880 while the majority were women by 1939. But female labour did not simply replace male labour. There were changes within the sexual divisions as much as between them. While gender did divide the labour market, it was not the only division. As various groups of women were progressively employed in the shop and office sector, the jobs they performed were recast. At the same time, different groups of men were recruited and the nature of the jobs they filled changed. The feminization process involved transformations in work and workers.

The theories usually employed to describe and explain feminization cannot adequately account for these developments in Victoria. They emphasize the uniformity of female labour. This thesis questions such homogenization theories as proletarianization, patriarchal state structuralism, reserve army of labour, and scientific management. It points to differentiation along many axes as changes in recruits' marital status, age and socio-educational backgrounds are examined. At the same time, I argue that while transformation in workers has been overlooked, transformation in work has been exaggerated. Most shop and office workers in Victoria in 1939 worked in small workplaces not dissimilar to the 1880s. The polarization of workplaces is another aspect of diversity. In brief, I have studied the processes which segmented, not unified, the retail and clerical workforces.
Introduction

This thesis is a contribution to both local and international labour historiography. In Australian labour historiography, white collar labour and the analysis of the sexual division of labour in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have been relatively neglected. By contrast, from 1974 there has been a steady stream of North American and British studies. From the outset of my work, however, it was not my intention merely to fill an Australian void. I realized from the time of my preliminary reading that a case study of an Australian state, not in the forefront of capitalism, would require a theoretical perspective different from those employed by American and British scholars. I sensed, too, that sources of a provincial and personal nature, rather than the records of the world's largest retail and clerical workplaces, would put a new perspective on many of the issues apparently resolved in the existing literature. Thus, the thesis has a dual purpose: to offer a critique of...
current theoretical perspectives and to begin the process of writing a history of white collar working women in Australia.

**Australian Historiographical Context: Neglected Subjects**

The changes involved in the 'administrative-retail revolution' in occupational structures, or the 'white blouse revolution', have been likened to the nineteenth century industrial revolution. Feminization is the shift in workforce composition from male to female. Shop and office occupations in all western industrial countries have feminized since the nineteenth century. In Australia, between 1881 and 1981, the proportion of shop assistants who were women rose from 15% to 50%, while the proportion of clerical workers who were women rose from 1% to 70%.

The feminization of Australian retail and clerical labour, however, has received scant attention from labour historians. Indeed, Australian shop and office labour in general has received little attention from historians. Shop and office workers seem to have been neglected because they are white collar. Australian labour historiography has been concerned with an unambiguous male working class defined both theoretically and politically.

First, some Marxists tend to identify the working class with productive labour, that is, labour devoted to making things and thereby adding value to raw materials. This added value created by manual labour is appropriated by capitalists and distributed in part to white collar workers who create no value. Marxist theory says that production is far more important than the tasks of distribution and exchange with which white collar workers are involved.

---


Marxist-influenced labour historians, then, have often neglected white collar workers because they are not engaged in production, because they create no value and because they are considered, therefore, to be almost 'middle class'.

Secondly, until the split in the labour movement in the late 1940s and early 1950s, white collar workers were politically inconspicuous. Shop and office workers had weak organizations which did not help found the Labor Party or organize the great industrial confrontations with employers. Internationally, there have still been historical studies on the politics of the German Wilhelmine Mittelstand and the lower middle class in Britain, particularly by sociologists. There are no comparable Australian historical studies. Australian white collar workers, at least before 1950 have been neglected by historians because they are regarded as neither left-wing nor right-wing subverters.

Shop and office feminization has been neglected, too, because, in addition to being about white collar workers, it is concerned with women. Others have written on the neglect of women in historical accounts. There is even less hope of the revolution amongst white collar women.

Although I do not manufacture revolutionaries, the involvement of shop and office workers and the Victorian Clerks' and the Shop Assistants' unions with the trade union, anti-sweating and feminist movements was politically significant. More importantly, the transformation of shop and office work from a marginal activity of middle class women to a mainstream female occupation

---


6 See, for instance, the bibliography in Geoffrey Crossick, ed., The Lower Middle Class in Britain, 1870-1914, London, 1977.
between 1880 and 1939 in Victoria was socially important. The neglect of shop and office workers has meant that a significant proportion of 'popular experience' has been overlooked. The history not only of female, but of male, workers in Australian shops and offices warrants more attention than has hitherto been given it.

The International Historiography: Testing its Conclusions

There is a standard version of the changes involved in the 'administrative-retail revolution' that recurs in the literature. Three things are said to have occurred.

1. Clerical and retail labour was deskilled, resulting in the establishment of the scientifically managed typing pool and the cash register operator.
2. A dual labour market was formed, in which the executives were nearly always male and the mass of ordinary white collar workers was overwhelmingly female.
3. The position of male workers was damaged, as employers tapped the reserve army of cheap and relatively unskilled female labour to replace skilled male shop assistants and clerks.7

I test this standard version in my Victorian case study.

First, the theme of the standard account is questioned. Most historians have examined shop and office feminization in terms of the loss in status and prestige suffered by male shop and office workers in the process of 'deskilling'. Women's experience is irrelevant because feminization is simply regarded as a symptom of the degradation of male labour. Even when women's experience is considered, feminization is regarded as almost a synonym for proletarianization. Proletarianization is the shift of lower middle class workers into the working class as predicted by Marx.

7 For example, Braverman, Labor and Monopoly Capitalism, and Davies, Woman's Place.
The theme of this thesis, by contrast, is that feminization was not simply a uniformly downward movement. The degradation of labour thesis overlooks two groups: ambitious males and young single women, for whom no 'paradise' was lost in the feminization pattern. My focus on these two groups has meant concentrating upon social relations other than simply gender relations. It has meant examining relations within the working class, especially those social relations based on age and education, as well as gender. It has meant examining internal contradictions historically, for some groups of men and women can be advantaged or disadvantaged at different times. The developing division of labour was more complex than a notion of proletarianization or feminization allows.

Secondly, with the existing literature in mind, I address quite specific questions. This thesis is not a history of major industrial issues or an inventory of changes in the work process. It is not a conventional narrative history. It is designed to test the main tenets of what I have called the standard version: that deskilling accompanied by scientific management occurred; that a dual labour market was formed with gender as the main division between workers; that the reserve army of labour operated as it is said to have operated. I consider the standard version chronologically in Chapters 2 to 6. I question the link between degradation of labour and women's entry into shops and offices in significant numbers in the 1880s in Chapter 2. In Chapter 3, I examine whether Victorian governments manipulated segregation to women's further disadvantage with their labour market intervention policies at the turn of the century. I throw doubt upon the organizational unity of male workers against female workers at the time of the establishment of arbitration in Chapter 4. I question whether the reserve army of female labour operated in the way it is commonly said to have around World War One in Chapter 5. Then, in Chapter 6, I consider two questions: whether mechanization and rationalization went hand in hand
with feminization; and whether employers were able to use scientific management and welfarism to create a dual labour market in interwar Victoria in which a skilled and privileged minority of workers was insulated from the unskilled and unprivileged workers.

My examination of these questions has produced somewhat negative conclusions. They temper the overseas standard version with the Victorian experience which involved later feminization and lower level commercial development. At the same time they make a positive contribution to labour history by indicating that overseas studies, which are in many respects inappropriate, should not become models for the Australian experience. This is the major conclusion of Chapter 7.

I have attempted in this thesis a fine-grained empirical case study of one group of working women. Generalized and theoretical accounts of women have abounded in recent years, but empirical studies informed by feminist theory have been slower to emerge. Yet it is through adopting a "narrower focus" that we will gain the knowledge necessary if we are to devise a "wider framework". By that I mean that detailed empirical studies are essential if we are to devise frameworks which take into account women's experience. By making clear the history of the sexual division of labour in shops and offices, I raise questions of the categories used to represent shop and office workers' history which I hope will contribute to a broader feminist research project, that of finding frameworks which are able to accommodate both men's and women's experience.

Feminization

2. Crammond and Dickson Staff, Warrnambool, 1890
You are in the employment of Mr George Robertson? Yes. How many hands have you? Seventy-five in Melbourne. That is in the book-selling? Yes- the book-selling and stationery... [and] the great majority of the retail dealers and small suburban shops...? ... as a matter of fact, very few of them have assistants... Do you make any distinction between boys and girls? We have no girls.

_Royal Commission on Employees in Shops_, Minutes of Evidence, 1883, clauses 793-810, Richard Powell Raymond, VPP, 1883, 3.

3. Crammond and Dickson Staff, Warrnambool, 1920
[Emily Jones] joined the employment of the firm [O. Gilpin, country stores] when she was 21 [in 1915] at the Swan Hill outlet earning 27 shillings and sixpence a week. From there she worked through to become a manageress and eventually was appointed to a five woman board of directors [c.1930]... It was quite unusual in those early years that a woman would be on a board of management, but to have five forming the full board was extremely unusual. They were among the highest paid women in Victoria [on £1000 a year]... All the employees in the firm were also women [c.500] and all were under the guidance of [Emily Jones].

Smaller Hats: Feminization and Proletarianization?

4. Victorian Railways. Engineer-in Chief's Branch. 1862
Fifteen or twenty years ago many of the positions already enumerated, and particularly tellers' and ledgerkeepers' posts, were filled by men at or approaching middle age, with large experience, capacity and sense of responsibility, and at salaries from £400 to £600 per annum.

For the ordinary clerk, there was not the excitement of decision-making but the boredom of a monotonous job. The motion of the steel pen across endless sheets of note paper filled one's day. There is a poem in the Melbourne Punch which suggests that some clerks were not happy with their traditional position...

...But as for us poor wretched souls
T’is ours to toil below
And write and write these paper rolls
And make the black ink flow

For copy, copy on we must
Till the bright day's decline
And half past the day, is just
when we get home to dine....

5. Victorian Railways. Some of the 600 Women Sitting Tests for 4 Vacancies. 1933
Most of Australia's white collar workers were under 40, and more than half were women...Almost all women were in junior positions. Eighteen-year old Larky Weise[s]'... father was a stoker at the local gasworks and her mother a nurse... Larky was a white collar worker in a working-class home- one of many young Australians in that situation.
1.1 Retail and Clerical Labour Histories and Labour Market Models

This study, like all labour histories, is premised upon a particular labour market model. The aspects of occupational history covered in any study depend very much upon the theoretical model underpinning it. Different questions are asked in different models. How we explain feminization depends very much on what theoretical model is adopted. Most histories of retail and clerical feminization can be grouped into two approaches, the classifications being determined on the basis of how the histories describe the labour market structure and how they explain feminization. I argue that a reconsideration of how feminization is approached is necessary because the history of retail and clerical workers is becoming trapped between these two approaches to feminization.

Until recently, historians analyzing shop and office workers were preoccupied with the problem of class, specifically of whether male shop and office workers lost the middle class position they held in the nineteenth century. Although based on different economic theories, these histories share a conception that the labour market is unitary and competitive. They also explain feminization by the demand-side of the labour market equation: change in the sexual division of labour is explained by the readiness and ability of employers in the workplace to employ women. These histories are about capital and labour and collectively comprise what will be described as the workplace rationalization approach.
From the 1970s, a critique of this approach was begun on the basis that it ignored patriarchy, that is the wider system of male dominance over women. Occupational histories of women's experience began to be written which examined labour market balkanization resulting from systematic discrimination against women by men. These histories share a dichotomous conception of the labour market: it is divided into two non-competing male and female parts. They examine the methods which male employers and male, mostly unionist, workers utilized to keep women in a subsidiary position in shop and office work and to retain the benefits of women's unpaid domestic labour. These studies tend to go outside the labour market to explain women's readiness and ability to be employed in paid labour and to explain which jobs women entered. Preoccupied with women's position in a sexually-divided labour market, they comprise what will be described as the gender approach.

A bifurcation based on the two labour market perspectives has developed in histories of shop and office workers: there are studies of shop and office workers which concentrate upon the increased demand for clerical labour and the effect of feminization on male class and status since the nineteenth century; and studies of women shop and office workers which concentrate upon women's increased labour market participation and their inequality in paid shop and office labour.¹

Many historians have become committed to one or other approach to the labour market and to one or other side of the labour market equation. Of course, these two approaches need not be competing. It is compatible, for instance, to hold that the feminization of the workforce is associated with

¹ For a discussion of the analogous division of sociology of work studies into a 'job model' for men and a 'gender model' for women, see Rosalyn L. Feldberg and Evelyn Nakano Glenn, 'Male and Female: Job versus Gender Models in the Sociology of Work', Social Problems, 26/5, 1979, pp. 524-38.
workplace rationalization and that women got the bad jobs owing to the wider system of social production and sexism. If it were the case that the two approaches correctly described the same phenomena, but from different vantage points, there would be no problem. A model could be suggested that simply combined the two main approaches. Indeed, there has been a steady stream of writings advocating the integration of class and gender themes in occupational studies.² I argue, however, that there are also empirical problems with the way in which both the workplace rationalization and gender approaches have been applied. It would be wrong simply to integrate them. A discussion of the debate within the two main approaches leads to a consideration of a third approach.

Workplace Rationalization Approach

Workplace rationalization histories are characterized by a common concern that retail and clerical workers, together with those who own the means of retail and clerical production, have tended to become homogenized since the late nineteenth century. It is also argued that the condition of retail and clerical work has become more uniform.³

By far the most common analysis of shop and office labour is that of degradation of labour which is the mainstay of workplace rationalization histories. Degradation of labour involves both deskilling and a loss in status for workers. It is argued that shop and office work has been degraded from its

---


nineteenth century heights: workers have lost skill, pay, control over the work process and occupational status during the period of feminization.

Deskilling is usually regarded as a product of management strategies. Employers reorganized retail and clerical work and introduced labour-saving machinery in order to simplify the labour process, to increase their profits and, depending on your perspective, to undermine the powerful elite of skilled workers. The deskilling of shop and office workers to the level of manual workers or machine operators homogenizes a large proportion of the labour market. Deskilling, thus, has great significance for class analysis.

Retail and clerical labour histories written in the workplace rationalization tradition agree that male shop and office workers were deskilled and lost status from the 1880s. Controversy surrounds the questions of how much status men lost and how much the division between the lower middle class and the working class was undermined. The two main positions in historical accounts are Marxian and Weberian. Marx argued that there were two politically significant classes, capitalists and the proletariat. He predicted that wage labour would homogenize as capitalism developed. The traditional privileges of skilled workers would be undermined by the creation of a reserve army of labour of the unemployed and of those willing to work for less than subsistence wages. The power and class consciousness of the working class would grow relative to the power of capital as homogenization eliminated traditional divisions between workers and reduced them to a common status. If one takes a traditional Marxian position, as did F. D.

---

4 The sociological debate is far wider. Nicos Poulantzas defines the proletariat as only manual productive workers and argues that shop and office workers, albeit degraded, form a new middle class in *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, London, 1975. Erik Olin Wright argues that low-level shop and clerical employees belong to the proletariat but others occupy contradictory class locations in "Class Boundaries in Advanced Capitalist Societies", *New Left Review*, 98, pp. 3-41. Anthony Giddens has argued that the feminization of lower white collar jobs has created a buffer zone between blue and white collar occupations because women do not develop class consciousness in *The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies*, London, 1973.
Klingender in 1935 and Harry Braverman in 1974, then homogenization and proletarianization have occurred. Proletarianization is the process whereby lower middle class workers sink into the working class. Workplace hierarchy, feminization, insecurity of employment and salary decline are held to be evidence of proletarianization: clerical and retail workers are the "growing working class occupations".5

Weber argued that there were four classes stratified by property ownership and status: the propertied class; a class combining the intelligentsia, administrators and managers; the traditional petty bourgeois, that is, small businessmen and shopkeepers; and the working class. Weber also paid great attention to status as a variable which could not be reduced to class. If one takes a Weberian position, as did C. Wright Mills in 1951 and David Lockwood in his 1958 study of black-coated workers, then, while shop and office workers' objective position has deteriorated, there are still important status differences between groups of white collar and blue collar workers.6

Harry Braverman's labour process study has been particularly popular. A number of studies have used it as a model for arguments that shop and office work has been transformed from skilled labour to unskilled labour, or more specifically, from male skilled labour to female unskilled labour since the nineteenth century. In Margery Davies' words, "the nineteenth-century clerk had not turned into a proletarian; he had merely turned into a woman".7

---


6 C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes*, New York, 1951. David Lockwood, *The Blackcoated Worker: A Study in Class Consciousness*, London, 1958, pp. 87-89. It has been pointed out that the Marxist and Weberian conclusions are not incompatible: recent changes may have meant that proletarianization has occurred since the 1950s when Lockwood wrote his account. See Rosemary Crompton and Gareth Jones, *White-Collar Proletariat: Deskilling and Gender in Clerical Work*, Philadelphia, 1984, p. 32.

Capital, particularly corporate capitalism, used deskilling strategies of scientific management and feminization to win control from skilled workers over the labour process. The department store and the typewriter allowed a greater division of retail and clerical labour and was accompanied by more extensive managerial surveillance and the introduction of time and motion systems of efficiency. Management employed unskilled women because, in addition to being cheaper, they had a low level of unionization, a high turnover and were consequently relatively powerless. Feminization inextricably followed economic expansion, mechanization, bureaucratization and rationalization. That is, feminization was an employers' control strategy.8

In the usual Marxist analysis, white collar workers' false consciousness, encouraged in various ways by employers, prevents them from becoming class conscious.9 The slow emergence of white collar trade unions illustrates this point. The emphasis in Australian studies of shop and office workers has been on the late development of white collar trade union militancy.10 Women enter these accounts only as bad trade unionists, unskilled labour and employers' agents of proletarianization. Women are assigned a homogeneous status as degraded wage workers who have replaced skilled male labour.

By far the most common subject of analysis in workplace rationalization histories is the development of monopoly or corporate capitalism. Since Klingender, most studies of shop and office workers have focused on "large-

---

9 Giddens, Class Structure, p. 188.
scale amalgamation and the introduction of machines".\textsuperscript{11} Around the turn of the century, small, family-owned firms gave way to joint-stock businesses, leading to the development of giant department stores and corporations. Feminization within modern, expanding, competitive business was contingent upon several factors. As Samuel Cohn shows, for example, modern, expanding, competitive offices which were labour intensive and which operated upon 'criteria of economic efficiency' feminized before offices that were capital and not labour intensive.\textsuperscript{12} It is generally accepted that the capitalist tendency is towards the development of modern feminizing corporations, although the process has been uneven, protracted and incomplete. Lockwood argued that in 1958 monopoly capitalist organization had not yet developed in Britain: he did not criticize the assumption that it would.

There are significant empirical problems with most versions of the workplace rationality approach. In the first place, historians have begun to question the blanket assumption which is the basis of the degradation of labour thesis: that all male shop and office workers in the late nineteenth century were skilled. Shop and office historians, such as Gregory Anderson, have suggested that a secondary clerical labour market of unskilled workers had already developed by the latter part of the nineteenth century in Britain and America.\textsuperscript{13} By the late nineteenth century, the majority of employees in retail and clerical hierarchies spent their time simply copying letters, entering ledgers and laboriously adding accounts or being messengers. Graeme Davison's detailed examination of changes in the counting houses and commercial offices in Melbourne in the 1880s reveals the existence of a

\textsuperscript{11} Klingender, \textit{Condition of Clerical Labour}, p. 58.


\textsuperscript{13} Gregory Anderson, \textit{Victorian Clerks}, Manchester, 1976, pp. 5-7.
growing secondary labour market of young boys. We must beware of idealizing nineteenth century craft skills for if we do we will exaggerate the degree of deskilling that men have experienced or even see deskilling where it did not occur at all.

Secondly, a few historians have also begun to question the blanket assumption that all female shop and office work is unskilled. They have begun to examine the development of various grades of female work and have pointed out the gender bias in skill assessment. Teresa Davy argues that by 1939, women from different socio-educational backgrounds were employed in three distinctive grades of work in London: skilled personal secretaries, secretarial and clerical workers in better class offices, and unskilled workers in offices and typing pools. Other historians are questioning whether women were ever unskilled, invariably committed to domestic labour and always a docile workforce. Samuel Cohn, for example, argues that individual employers had to manufacture what have been considered 'natural' female attributes. Given an increasing supply of labour, employers had the power to discriminate. They chose the most productive source of labour, young, unmarried women. Then, employers forced them to leave waged employment upon marriage. This "synthetic turnover" policy was a management strategy.

---

Thirdly, economists have begun to question whether a "neat structural metamorphosis" from small counting houses to huge bureaucracies has actually occurred or will occur. Instead, they argue that we still have a dual structure consisting of both small peripheral and large core business. The two types of business differ in terms of "economic size, organizational structure, industrial location, factor endowment, time perspective and market concentration". Large core corporations are profitable and stable. They are able to afford some non-competitive policies and systems such as good working conditions for some workers. The peripheral businesses operate on much smaller profit margins in a competitive environment and are less secure and flexible. Peripheral businesses "resembling the entrepreneurial firms of the late nineteenth century" have continued to be formed alongside large corporations.

The common versions of the rationalization approach, then, overstate the homogenization of skills and the extent of deskilling. They idealize nineteenth century male clerical labour and understate the skills and social differentiation of women in the 1930s. Most histories adopting the rationalization approach also exaggerate the dominance of big business. It remains true, however, that there was some homogenization and deskilling of labour and that a core sector did develop at the expense of the peripheral sector. My rejection of the rationalization approach rests upon what it does not seek to explain. Feminization was a complex and multifaceted process. Most proponents of the workplace rationalization approach have been interested in only some features. The rationalization approach, for example,

19 Lowe, Women in the Administrative Revolution, p. 3.
does not explain why it was that some women and some men profitted from feminization. This can only be revealed by other approaches.

Gender Approach

Exponents of the gender approach argue that the rationalization approach does not consider women's position adequately and they have sought to redress the balance with studies which focus specifically on women's position in the labour market. These histories have been largely based on a dual labour market model based on sex in which men occupy the primary labour market, with good pay and conditions, and women occupy the secondary labour market, with poor pay and conditions.

The economic theory which underlies these studies was first proposed by Doeringer and Piore in 1971 and by Reich, Gordon and Edwards in 1973. Doeringer and Piore argued that there were primary and secondary non-competing labour markets. Employers provided career structures, on-the-job training and high wages to skilled employees which would ensure they did not leave the firm. Women and racial minorities, excluded from the primary labour market, formed a secondary labour market. Reich, Gordon and Edwards agreed that there was a dual labour market structure but argued that employers did not intend simply to reward stable, skilled employees and to ensure their loyalty. Instead, they argued that employers created these markets in order to divide and rule their labour forces which were threatening to homogenize.

Those adopting the gender approach cite such models and say that, as technological change has proceeded, women have been allocated the deskill ed jobs and employers have been most concerned to divide their work force by gender. But they do not identify technology itself as the mechanism which facilitated the development of a gendered labour market. Rather, they attribute women's relegation to the secondary labour market to patriarchy; ideologically motivated discrimination against women on the part of male employers.

Women's unequal labour position in one version of the gender approach is considered to be the result of ideology. Change, then, is a matter of ideology. It has been argued, for example, that the expansion of employment in women's middle class occupations between 1851 and 1911 in England did not result from the wider economic structures creating demand but resulted from changes in the 'doxy' or pervasive ideology. Ellen Jordan argues that women intellectuals, reformers and feminists saw through the existing restrictive ideology for women and agitated for change. Nineteenth century women activists were instrumental in winning educational reform which provided girls with an education similar to that of boys and raised girls' workplace aspirations and opportunities. Women, particularly those associated with the Promotion of Women's Employment Society, introduced other women into new occupations such as clerking by a limited attack on the ideology which had created a sex- segmented labour force.25

More commonly, dual labour market historians, examining large corporations and state hierarchies, focus on employers' discrimination against women to explain why women did not make greater employment gains from the turn of

the century. Women's exclusion from the primary labour market is placed in a broader ideological framework which is associated with the idealization of domestic labour in the twentieth century. Desley Deacon, for example, has examined the political institutions which determined that women had a subordinate position in the New South Wales public service. She argues that women were forced into the secondary labour market from 1895 by politicians.

Discrimination by employers is not the only example of patriarchal ideology at work. Other historians have examined discrimination against women in the arbitration system and discriminatory protective labour legislation. Women's white collar employment in these accounts is explained by the fact that it was virtually the only avenue of employment left open to them. Some, such as Alice Kessler-Harris, argue that protective labour legislation directed women's labour into 'safe and clean' white collar occupations. Others hold that employers were prevented from employing cheap female labour in other occupations owing to trade union opposition or protective labour legislation which restricted women's hours and conditions of employment. Male white collar unionism, by contrast, is regarded as being particularly insipid, and white collar unions were unable to prevent the employment of women. All that male white collar workers could do was ensure that women would not be allowed equal pay and opportunity through the collective bargaining process. Edna Ryan has concentrated on the institutionalization of gender

segregation particularly through the operation of the Arbitration Court from 1907. Arbitration enshrined women's wages at two-thirds of a man's and restricted women to a limited number of "female occupations". Women had no power base in trade unions and were disadvantaged as industrial conflict became institutionalized in arbitration systems.

There are two problems with the gender approach. First, it simply adopts workplace rationalization conclusions. Jill Matthews explains feminization as a result of workplace rationalization: large-scale employers employed and exploited women while rationalizing office work in the 1920s and 1930s. Even those arguing that women did not experience a decline in wages or status, argue that degradation of males' labour and deskilling of the jobs involved still occurred.

What distinguishes dual labour model histories from workplace rationalization histories is that gender is considered more important than any other social division. This leads to a second problem, which relates to the first, however. Little distinction is made between women in the common trends. Diversity disappears: sector-specific occupational changes in age or socio-educational composition or segregation are subsumed under ideological gender order. This leads most dual labour proponents to argue that women's position in wage labour has not improved during the twentieth century. They regard the twentieth century as a period in which women's unequal labour position was enshrined and confidently cite statistics measuring women's horizontal and vertical segregation in the labour market.

---


31 On aspects of a drop in male and an improvement in women's status, see Game and Pringle, *Gender at Work*, pp. 46-9 for bank clerks and 73-4 for shop assistants. For the British experience from 1913-14, when female clerks' wages increased in the same period as male clerks' decreased, see Guy Routh, *Occupation and Pay in Great Britain 1908-79*, London, 1980, p. 124.

which show that women's segregation persists. The proportion of Australian women, for example, employed in occupations which have a greater proportion of women than the average in paid employment was 84% in 1911, 82% in 1971 and 83% in 1978.\(^3\)

That some women improved their position is outside the focus of the gender approach. Yet, it is clear that most women did not experience loss in being employed in shop and office employment as measured by the usual criteria used to assess male proletarianization. For women, alternative domestic or rural work was regarded as worse employment. Some women voted with their feet by entering white collar employment. There was more to women's employment than continued segregation and exploitation.

A modified human capital model offers a more promising dual labour approach. Human capital theory assumes that labour markets are unitary and competitive. Workers have a choice about whether they enhance their 'human capital' or competitiveness. All women are potential employees but they make rational individual choices about schooling and careers which determine their labour opportunities. Human capital explanations argue that women do not invest in education and employers do not give women the training which would open up skilled and high-paying jobs because women's wage labour is subservient to their bearing and caring for children and lifecycle participation in employment. Women, then, choose not to become educated, skilled or to gain work experience. William Sinclair, for example, employs a human capital argument for the influx of women into the Melbourne labour market in the decade of the First World War.\(^3^4\) As shop and office work


developed, middle class, young, single women who had not previously worked decided to enter the workforce. They decided that it would be more profitable or desirable to enter lower white collar employment than to remain in unpaid domestic work at home.

Human capital explanations used to ignore inequality but more recently their proponents have acknowledged that labour markets are imperfectly competitive and that choice can be restricted. A modified version accepts that the labour market is divided by gender. Men invest their human capital in the primary labour market while women are forced by prejudice to invest theirs in the less remunerative secondary market. Elyce Rotella correlates the movement of women into office positions with changes in the labour process which meant an increase in a demand for workers with firm-general skills rather than firm-specific skills. Economic expansion and the division of labour resulted in the skill requirements changing from being specific to a particular firm to becoming general, widely-held skills. In the process, employers were relieved of the costs of training. Employers were prepared to employ women because, in addition to being cheap and having a high turnover, women required little training. The supply of middle class women educated in the routine clerical skills and with intentions to leave the workforce upon marriage grew. This increase in turn facilitated mechanization and routinization.

The virtue of the human capital model Rotella uses is that it directs our attention to human agency and divisions within gender. It focuses on the supply-side and tries to explain what made young women decide to join the paid workforce. More importantly, it examines which young women decided

that it was in their interest to train for white collar employment. The female commercial labour force in the United States was young, mainly under 24 and single. It was white and native-born. 36

Most versions of the gender approach give attention to only one type of labour market division: segmentation by gender. The gender approach is useful for women did hold a disproportionate number of poor jobs and patriarchal ideology is at least part of the explanation of that fact. The gender approach does not explain why it is that not all women had poor jobs, or why women from some social backgrounds had better jobs than other women, or why older women generally were paid more than younger women. It does not explain divisions which cut across gender. The gains to men and women within the labour market were unequal, but this commonplace observation needs to be qualified once we examine the unequal benefits flowing to members of the same sex in different occupations.

Segmental Approach

The criticisms of the workplace rationalization and gender approaches can be accommodated by another approach to the labour market; the segmental approach. With the proviso that segmental labour models have their problems, too, they cope better than the other two approaches with the fact that the labour market and economic structure were not becoming progressively more homogeneous.

The multi-segmental approach incorporates a potentially limitless number of divisions: gender, social background, race, age, marital status, and so on.

36 This cannot be proven for Australia. The Australian census shows that commerce attracted fewer migrants born outside Australia in the paid workforce than Australian born; in 1921 14% compared to 18% of women and 14% compared to 16% of men. 38% of women migrants were to be found in domestic service compared to 34% of Australian born. Only 27% of male migrants were in primary production compared to 33% of Australian born. Unfortunately, the data is not more specific or given for other census years. Census of the Commonwealth, 1921, Table 19.
Controversy over this model concerns the number of labour market segments. Marcia Freedman actually identifies as many as 14 labour market segments in her study of the American labour market with age being the most significant differentiation which was reflected in pay. Most segmentalists use two criteria to define a labour market as a distinct segment: the characteristics of the labour market and the workers. In the most popular segmental models, labour markets are structured by two dualisms: core and peripheral business sectors and primary and secondary jobs. The first segmented labour market model was the dual labour market theory outlined by Doeringer and Piore mentioned above. Although it is used by the proponents of the gender approach, this model was not exclusively based on gender. It resulted from a study of the creation of internal labour markets in individual firms. Firms offer on-the-job training, secure careers and high pay to primary labour market workers and no training, insecure employment and low pay to secondary labour market workers. The core sector businesses are not subject to the classical competitive pressures that peripheral businesses are. Consequently, the core businesses offer wage opportunities that the peripheral businesses cannot afford.

Reich, Gordon and Edwards have continued to be the leading proponents of the view that historical segmentation of the American labour market has occurred. They have described three phases in employer's labour market strategies which contributed to segmentation. First, in the nineteenth century a wage labour force was created. Second, during the first two decades of the twentieth century job conditions are said to have become homogenized to a common deskillled level. Third, from 1939, employers created segmentation or "increasingly distinct working conditions among different groups of

workers". They chose to introduce segmentation because routinization and mechanization were largely implemented but had resulted in widespread working class protest. Employers had little room to reduce costs or increase control by further intensifying labour. They decided to create privileged and segmented labour groups and to divide and rule their workforce. The widespread working class protest in the proletarianization era from the late nineteenth century to 1939 did not persist as objective conditions increasingly differed among labour market segments. Women, who were already discriminated against and paid on a different basis to men, did not experience homogenization or proletarianization in the same way as men.

Reich, Gordon and Edwards' segmental model has been criticized for its determinism and for its concentration upon the demand side of the labour market equation. In 1978, Jill Rubery criticized the attention given by Reich, Gordon and Edwards to rational-economic factors such as the size of the firm, the extent of concentration in a sector, the rate at which technology is adopted in structuring the labour market and the actions and motivations of capitalists. She argued that union organization and education and training systems tempered employers' control. Other historians have argued that control struggles occurred in workplaces. In American department stores, for example, employers had to negotiate over their control policies. In Australia, Gail Reekie's study of feminization of the largest department stores in Sydney takes these points into consideration. She shows that employers did not have it all their own way. Employers had to negotiate with unions and to consider their consumers before implementing their three-pronged strategy.

---

40 Ibid., pp. 151-2.
to increase profit and industrial harmony: welfarism, 'masculinization' schemes (executive grooming) and industrial-psychology.\(^{43}\)

Segmented labour model studies to date, even taking into account workers' organization, can look very much like workplace rationalization studies.\(^{44}\) There has been a concentration on demand-side structuring of the labour market which ignores supply-side structuring. By that I mean that segmental studies have concentrated on such demand-side factors as businesses' size, extent of control over market and the type of technology employed to explain why different businesses adopt different employment practices. They have not given much attention to such supply-side factors as education systems and the changing position of women in society to explain why different groups of people have different conditions of employment. They have also concentrated upon the position of male labour.

Christine Craig, Elizabeth Garnsey and Jill Rubery have begun to answer such criticisms -a tripartite advocacy of supply-side structuring to balance the Reich, Gordon and Edwards demand-side advocacy. They have argued that labour supply factors play a direct role in shaping the pattern of employment organization and inequality. In addition to the obvious demand-side factors, employers are constrained by institutional and broader social forces which structure the labour supply.\(^{45}\) They also point out that while segmentation

---


studies have established that the primary labour market was divided, they have assumed that the secondary labour market was homogeneous.46

The evidence for segmentation into male and female segments is clear; so, too, is the evidence for privileged and unprivileged sectors which only partly coincide with the male and female divisions. There have been few studies of the segmentation of shop and office workers between 1880 and 1939, however.47 Historians such as Meta Zimmeck and Ellen Jordan have made excellent beginnings by examining the middle class women's entry into shop and office jobs at the end of the nineteenth century.48 For Australia, Karen Fitzsimmons describes female 'office work, department and first class retail store' work as being the province of middle class women before 1891. She introduces a note of distinction in commercial labour, claiming that small retail establishments were different and working class women worked there. But she does not quantify this point or develop it.49 Changes thereafter, however, have not been examined. Margery Davies has suggested that by 1939, the female secondary labour market was divided for women in America but she has not related this to supply or mapped the change.

While some historians have shown that both demand and supply side factors have affected feminization, there have been no historical studies of shop and

46 See also, Ann Curthoys, For and Against Feminism: A personal journey into feminist theory and history, Sydney, 1988, p. 118.
47 Trudy Boon and Angela Jones, 'Aspects of Female Clerical Workers in Australia', Women's Sociological Bulletin, 1/3, June 1981, pp. 41-52. Rosemary Crompton and Margaret L. Hedstrom examine segmentation in relation to married women in Britain and America, respectively, in the postwar period: 'The Feminisation of Clerical Labour Force Since the Second World War', and 'Beyond Feminisation: Clerical Workers in the United States From the 1920s through the 1960s', in Gregory Anderson, ed., The White-Blouse Revolution: Female office workers since 1870, Manchester and New York, 1988, pp. 121-143 and 147-159. My thanks to Barrie McDonald for drawing my attention to this publication when I was in the last stage of preparing my thesis.
office workers, to my knowledge, which have investigated the detail of the structuring of the supply side and the demand side of the labour market from the nineteenth century. The discussion has been on determining which is the predominant factor, technology or demography. In the chapters that follow, an attempt is made to show the operation of both supply and demand side factors on the structure of retail and clerical occupational labour market in Victoria from 1880 to 1939.

1.2 Conclusion: A Theme for Liberating a Victorian Case Study

This thesis is particularly concerned with the gender approach's themes of horizontal and vertical segregation. Women were segregated in 'women's occupations', such as retail and clerical jobs, and women were relegated to the bottom of occupational hierarchies in occupations. At the same time, I have been concerned with the workplace rationalization approach's class themes of the social consequences of differences between workers and changes in the labour process over time. My study does not fit either the workplace rationalization or gender approach pattern, however.

My work is based on a third approach, a segmental labour market approach, which addresses divisions in the labour market. This approach holds that the labour market has departed from pure classical and neo-classical market principles: that non-market barriers have been erected which prevent job mobility operating in accordance with workers' abilities, degrees of ambition and willingness to accept the going rate of pay. The labour market is not unitary nor is it simply divided into two by gender. A segmented labour market contrasts both with the single competitive labour market of neo-classical models, the homogenization of wage labour argued for in Marxist models, and the dichotomous dual labour market model based on gender. According to the segmental approach, the labour market consists of varying numbers of separate markets based on such indices as gender, class, race,
age and marital status. The pattern of employment in different types of businesses and industries also departs from pure classical and neo-classical principles. Some businesses, whether as a result of their size, their control over their markets or the type of technology employed, do not have competitive labour markets, and choose to institute better conditions of employment for some of their workers.

I am concerned with both class and gender in the workplace. Cynthia Cockburn, for example, examines together the processes of class and gender in her study of compositors who were reduced in the last century to typesetters. This leads her to consider the relations between "groups of people within the working class". The working class is regarded as having been restructured around the compositors dynamically; it is "continuously changing, dividing, recomposing". As Cockburn shows, integrating class and gender themes means addressing the continued fragmentation within the working class and the work that its members perform.

Historians employing the gender or rationalization approaches do recognize that the labour market is fragmented. They do not, however, place much significance on these divisions. The labour segmentation approach on which this study is based also contrasts with the workplace rationalization and gender approaches in its integrative approach to causation. By that I mean both demand and supply are considered to be integral to the labour market structure. Divisions produced within the labour market interact with divisions within populations at large.


Significant aspects of occupational history are untrapped by a segmental approach. Anticipating the contents of Chapters 2 to 6 of this thesis, retail and clerical occupations did not only expand and feminize, with women getting the worst jobs, but employers tapped changing and largely non-competing groups of labour within the sexes to fill the expanding number and changing type of jobs. Recent histories with other themes have overlooked the significance of this occupational change. As we shall see, while some men tried to improve their position relative to women, they also tried to improve their position relative to men. At the end of the nineteenth century, for instance, white collar men in Victoria organized a professional movement in order to standardize credentials, win wage increases and job security and to exclude less skilled men and women. They found large growing businesses, in particular, willing to reward them. Segmentation also resulted in some women improving their position relative to other women and groups of women having different interests. The recruitment of young women with educational certificates in the 1880s, for example, was sometimes to the detriment of older, uncertificated women's employment. Older, privileged, public service women did not agree with many younger, private sector shop and office women on the equal pay issue.

Integrating class and gender themes, then, does not only involve integrating subject matter. It involves asking questions other than those to do with the homogenization of shop and office workers or the homogenization of female labour. It involves conceiving the labour market and how it operates differently from the workplace rationalization and gender approaches.
Familial Retailing

6. Mrs Eliza Cole of Coles Book Arcade, c.1890

Cole himself was an attraction as was his wife. He had advertised on 3 July 1875 in the Herald.

A GOOD WIFE WANTED
TWENTY POUNDS REWARD
POSITIVELY BONA FIDA
I, EDWARD WILLIAM COLE
BOOK ARCADE, BOURKE STREET

He had asked for a "spinster, 35-6 years of age, good-tempered, intelligent, honest, truthful, sober, chaste, neat but not extravagantly dressed." He further stated: "If I get a good, sensible and suitable wife instead of unsuitable which I should very likely get in the usual way then ... my twenty pounds [is] well spent". In reply came a letter from one Eliza Jordan. "I think your letter is a very sensible one" said Cole. They were wed and like any story-book romance lived happily ever after with a large family of happy children.

Patsy Adam Smith, Victorian and Edwardian Melbourne from old photographs. Sydney, 1979, photos 112-119.

7. Seth Rodolphus Clark's Melbourne shop, 1885

Q. Do you employ female labour?  A. Only one, a sister-in-law, as bookkeeper...  A. We have [5 employees and have] been paying them 35s. lately. My daughter is in the shop and takes the money- I pay her 10s.  Q. Is she under the Act?  A. I do not know.

I [was 23 when I] entered the service [the Postal Department] on 10th October, 1884, as what was known then as a "twilighter"-that is, between the time the old Victorian pensions were abolished, and the new Public Service Regulations came into force in 1885. I did not pass any clerical examination, although studying for it, as I was appointed before the examination was held. Prior to this I had passed the telegraphy examination, but had to pass another test in telegraphy on entering the office. I was then appointed what was called an "assistant" in those days...[I] have passed from assistant through telegraphist, to postmistress at various offices.


9. Daisy Webster's Merit Certificate. 1901
Daisy had three sisters- one stayed at home, the youngest was employed as a shop assistant at Buckley and Nunn's...Daisy had Merit Certificate which obtained a positions at Lysaghts of assistant typist (beginner). She was sent to Zercho's Business College by the company where she learnt Pitman's shorthand and rudimentary bookkeeping....
Ruth Amberly, (pseudonym), writing for her mother, Daisy Webster who began paid employment in 1903.
Education Department,
VICTORIA.

CERTIFICATE OF MERIT.

This is to Certify
that Daisy Webster
has passed in all the Subjects of Instruction
prescribed for the Sixth Class.

Dated at State School, Victoria No.
this _._._._._. Day of A.D. 1901

[Signature]
Inspector of Schools.
Chapter Two: "What Shall We Do With Our [Middle Class, Educated] Girls?" in Victoria in the 1880s

The number of callings for educated women is so few, that the addition of even one will be hailed as a great boon by many families, who are beginning to find the question "What shall we do with our girls?" rather difficult of solution. ¹

2.1 Women's entry into paid shop and office work

Many businesses operated with familial labour at the beginning of European settlement. A few cases have been documented. Maria Batman, the eldest of seven daughters, assisted her father, John, in his merchant business in the late 1830s while, in her husband's words, Mrs T. H. Nott's "carefulness and unremitting attention" was crucial to the success of the Nott manufacturing and retail confectionery businesses in the 1850s and 1860s.² The employment of women in shops and offices for wages was a new development, however. This development has been less well-documented. In 1861, Fanny Green became postmistress in charge of the telegraph station at Chiltern and Mary McLeod became keeper of a mining board office. Margaret Walker became a station master in 1862, Margaret Allen became a clerk in the Post Office mail department in 1876, Harriet Weedons became a first saleswoman in the strawgoods and millinery department of Bright and Hitchcocks in 1878 and Eliza Hicks became a millinery and dressmaking manageress in the Mutual Store in 1880.³ These six women were pioneers. They were relatively skilled and well-paid.⁴ By the 1880s, they had female staff under them.

¹ Age, 22 March 1872, referring to women telegraph operators.
³ Statistical Register of Victoria, 1881, Blue Book. Bright and Hitchcocks, London Letters, 1877-81, University of Melbourne Archives (UOMA), 6 April 1878. Mutual Store Board of Directors, Minute Book, 13 October 1880, UOMA.
⁴ Mary McLeod was an agent, Fanny Green was paid £180 annually, Margaret Walker's salary was £112, Harriet Weedons' salary was £200, and in the same shop, Miss Jones received £226, and Mrs Hicks' salary was £208. This was at a time when a male labourer's
There was a wave of women employed in commerce in the 1880s. Between 1881 and 1891, the number of women employed in shops and offices in Victoria more than doubled; Table 2-1 indicates some of the sectors.\(^5\)

**Table 2-1: Feminization of Selected Shop and Office Occupations by %, Victoria, 1871-1891** (absolute numbers in brackets)\(^6\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>1871</th>
<th>1881</th>
<th>1891</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bank Staff</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government Clerks</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telegraph</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>32.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial Clerks</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Typists</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>93.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drapery</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>16.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bookseller</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>30.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These women are usually described as young and unskilled and employed in large workplaces in accounts which concentrate upon degradation of labour. The employment of 24 year old Mary Swifte, as a typist at the Bank of Australasia in 1886, and 15 year old Margaret Riggs, as a cashier messenger and then haberdashery assistant at Foy and Gibson's department store in 1888, would seem to fit these categories.\(^7\)

Most historians who have examined women's early shop and office employment in Australia have explained it as an economic and rational effect annual wages were about £100, a male head clerk earned a salary of £200-300 and a male drapers' assistant, £125-200. For the context to these rates, see Graeme Davison, *The Rise and Fall of Marvellous Melbourne*. Melbourne, 1978, pp. 190-3.

\(^5\) There were 325 women in clerical jobs and perhaps as many as 1581 women were in paid shop assisting in 1881 compared to 1155 and 3476 respectively in 1891. Only in the 1891 census are women dealing and receiving salary or wages clearly given.

\(^6\) *Census of Victoria*, 1871, 1881 and 1891, Occupations of the People. The census does not give Government clerks for 1891 so the Public Service Board's report has been used. The 1899 report considered women in the public service for the first time and listed 586 women public servants, or 12% of the public service including goal and asylum staff, while women made up 13.5% of the clerical staff in 1898. The figure for 1891 was probably similar since the *Statistical Register of Victoria*, 1891, Blue Book, lists 357 women in state office jobs while there were 340 in 1898; *Public Service Board Report*, 1899, p. 6, *VPP*, 1899-1900, 3.

\(^7\) For similar reasons, the *Report of Post and Telegraph Department*, 1891, Victorian Parliamentary Papers, *VPP*, 1892-3, 3, is used for telegraph operators.

ANZ Banking Group Archives. *Service*, 13 October 1948, pp. 4-5. Swifte was on a salary of £65 and Riggs was on a wage perhaps as little as 2s.6d. For the context of female wages, see Florence Gordan, *The Conditions of Female Labour and the Rates of Women's Wages in Sydney*, *Australian Economist*, 23 August 1894, p. 427.
of capitalist development. It is argued that from the end of the nineteenth century the formation of large workplaces meant a more complex division of labour. A new stratum of routine jobs formed in commercial and bureaucratic workplaces. Personal and paternalistic workplace relations were replaced by impersonal rational control in developing bureaucracies. The growth in workplace size and work hierarchies was accompanied by a preference for female labour. Women were employed to fill the places at the bottom of the hierarchy in the expanding secondary labour market; the sector of 'bad', poorly-paid and insecure jobs. Women "reduced wage costs, contributed to a fragmented working class and encouraged a transitory and expendable workforce". They were the emporium assistants and typists.

Employers' preference for young female labour was said to be contingent upon two other developments in Victoria. First, women were a cheap and plentiful labour supply. In Victoria in the 1870s and 1880s, the sex ratios balanced and there was a significant increase in the number of unmarried or "surplus" women. Public concern developed over the 'overcrowding' of existing women's occupations. White collar employers looking for a secondary labour supply seized upon these 'surplus women'. Secondly, this glut of women coincided with educational reform, particularly the 1872 Victorian Education Act. The Act devalued shop and office literacy skills and resulted in "any young woman [being able to] take [sales and clerical] positions at an hour's notice, as long as she could handle a pen".

8 Davison, Rise and Fall, pp. 19 - 40.
12 Royal Commission on Employees in Shops, Second Progress Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Best Means of Regulating and Shortening the Hours of Employees in Shops and Wholesale and Retail Trading Establishments, Minutes of Evidence, 1883, clause 565, George Wright, pastry cook, VPP, 1883, 3. For similar arguments concerning
Clearly, employers had good reasons to employ women. But the situation was not as the logic of capitalist development might dictate. The majority of shop and office workers at the bottom of the developing labour hierarchies in Victoria before 1891 were men. As we shall see, only a small group of single, literate women entered paid shop and office work. While marital status and literacy were recruitment considerations, they were not the sole criteria for paid commercial and bureaucratic employment. According to the 1871 census, 85% of women aged 15 to 24 were able to read and write. In 1881, 68% of women aged 20 to 24 had not married. The popular explanation, then, does not explain which women entered shop and office work or why the feminization rate was not higher.

More attention needs to be given to the specific late nineteenth century, middle-class problem of "what to do with our girls" to explain the particular pattern of women's increased white collar employment. There were too many eligible spinsters 'to be married to the boys'. As was noted in the Age, however, it was those of "gentle birth and breeding", previously socially prohibited from working for money who were now "asserting themselves". They were "invading" men's lower white collar occupations. Respectability decreed they could not become domestic servants or factory hands. They had to make paid shop and office employment respectable. Women's employment in the 1880s occurred because women, for reasons of their own, challenged employer's recruitment policies and a number of employers proved receptive. Willing and able middle class women had to fight

women's entry into American offices, see Margery W. Davies, Woman's Place Is at the Typewriter: Office Work and Office Workers 1870-1930, Philadelphia, 1982, pp. 28-78.
13 Census of Victoria, 1871, Education of the People, Table II. 82% of men aged 15 to 25 could read and write.
14 Peter McDonald, Marriage in Australia: Age at First Marriage and Proportions Marrying, 1860-1971, Canberra, 1974, p. 94.
15 See, for example: Age, 22 March 1872; Rachel MacPherson, 'Woman's Work in Victoria', Victorian Review, June, 1880, pp. 203-205.
16 Age, 23 February 1889.
stereotypes for entry into waged shop and office occupations. Employers were making an experiment in employing these women which was tangential to the developing division of labour amongst their male employees. In Victoria in the 1880s, most employers were much more interested in the boys than the girls.

This chapter, however, is not only about providing the neglected supply side to the feminization story and examining factors which hindered change. It is also about the mechanisms which facilitated the change. It introduces a third factor: the State's crucial role in mediating between supply and demand, particularly in creating the educational facilities which are crucial to understanding women's participation in paid shop and office work. The beginnings of the era of the single business girl has to be placed in the context of educated, middle class women acquiring skills as much as deskilling and, therefore, degradation of labour.

2.2 Shop and office work only for some women: Employment pattern among women changes

Even before the balancing of the sex ratios, there was concern at the plight of single, young and unemployed women in Australian towns. In mid-nineteenth century Victoria, there were pitifully few paid labour opportunities for women. Women's paid employment grew in the late nineteenth century in Victoria while decreasing slightly for English women: the proportion of women enumerated in the census as being in the paid workforce in Victoria increased from 17% to 27% between 1871 and 1901 while, at the same time, the proportion decreased in England from 34% to 29%. It is often said that

---

17 Caroline Chisholm's first campaigns were over the limited wage labour opportunities of young, single women in Sydney, Margaret Kiddle, Caroline Chisholm, Melbourne, 1950, pp. 28-29 and 39.

there was little respectability attached to being unmarried and employed in colonial Australia.\textsuperscript{19} The number of young women entering paid employment after 1850, however, created pressure for it to become socially acceptable. By 1891, 45\% of those aged 15 to 24 were in paid labour with the figure rising thereafter.

Whatever women's inclination to enter paid employment, their prospects varied by socio-economic class. In the 1870s, women's industrial employment grew and at the same time young working class women chose not to enter domestic service. In 1871, 53\% of women in wage labour in Victoria were in domestic service but this figure dropped to 42\% by 1891. A large proportion of English domestic servants came from English agricultural districts. Immigration to Victoria in the late nineteenth century, on the other hand, tended to be from the British city to the Victorian metropolis. In 1881, 32.6\% of Victoria's population lived in Melbourne and, under the combined effects of a baby boom and immigration, the proportion had risen to 42.9\% by 1891. Given an alternative, young urban women from families with members working in the expanding commercial and industrial sectors were less likely to choose domestic service. The most significant alternative was provided by the growth in industry.

Urban middle class commentators in the 1880s complained both about the servant problem and the lack of genteel employment opportunities for their own girls. Middle class women, indigent or not, were not attracted to either domestic service or the growing manufacturing jobs which together accounted for 90\% of female employment in the 1881 Victorian census. Commentators were most concerned at what middle class girls would do

since the chances for "marriageable" girls finding "eligible" husbands were decreasing.20

Demographic changes produced 'surplus' women. Before 1860, Victoria's population was characterized by an excess of males; a relatively low proportion of males married and a relatively high proportion of females married. After 1860, natural population increase, female immigration and the out-migration of males resulted in a more even balance of the sexes. The 1871 and 1881 censuses recorded an excess of young women aged 15 to 24 over men. The sex balance resulted in a falling proportion of women married between 1860 and 1880. By 1881, 33% of women aged 25 to 29 were "never married" in Victoria compared with only 15.1% in 1861.21 This rise in 'surplus' women coincided with a drop in the Victorian birthrate from 43.29 per 1000 in 1860 to 64 to 30.64 per 1000 in 1880-84. The marriage rate dropped from 8.16 per 1000 in 1860-64 to 6.21 in 1875 to 79 but, unlike the other two trends, this one was reversed during the 1880s.

These demographic changes, however, were not experienced evenly throughout rural Victoria or throughout the metropolitan area. Recent research on Melbourne rate books has found a correlation between the presence of white collar workers, residential location in southern and eastern suburbs, lower fertility and a preponderance of women.22 Interested contemporaries consulting the official figures similarly concluded that there were 'surplus' young girls from white collar families living in Melbourne and other Victorian towns who had an inclination to seek white collar employment. 39% of the females aged 25 to 29 in Melbourne in 1881 were still "never

21 McDonald, Marriage in Australia, pp. 86-110. See also, Victorian Year Book, 1939-40, p. 90.
married" compared to 21% in 1861. The overall birthrate in Melbourne fell from 36.6 per 1000 in 1871 to 32.4 per 1000 in 1881. The southern suburbs of Prahran, Emerald Hill, St Kilda, Brighton, Hawthorn and Kew, however, had lower than average rates with the Brighton falling from 46.3 to 29.4 per 1000 between 1871 and 1881. These suburbs, moreover, had 16% more women than men at a time when there continued to be more men than women in Victoria overall. Some of these women were servants freeing middle class girls from domestic duties. But what were they free to do?

Rachel MacPherson could name only two 'genteel methods' of wage-earning for the average middle class girl in 1880: pupil teaching and telegraphy. In the absence of genteel jobs, she concluded that paid employment would never be a prospect for most young middle-class women. She directed unmarried women to train in domestic skills and to become efficient housekeepers. Efficient housekeepers reduced household costs and were less of a "drag on father or brother". More importantly, young men of limited incomes would be more likely to marry if women could manage households economically. MacPherson could not foresee any employment alternative to preparing for marriage for middle class girls.

The female employment pattern in commerce in Victoria in the mid-nineteenth century was inherited from Britain. It had been commonplace for women to be involved in business, particularly keeping books and marketing produce, in eighteenth century England. Single women could set up retail business and widows often continued their husbands' businesses in their own right.

23 Statistical Register of Victoria, 1881, Vital Statistics.
24 ibid., Population, pp. 10-17: Prahran, 9542 men, 11626 women; Emerald Hill, 12438, 12936; Brighton, 2183, 2572; Hawthorn 2730, 3289; Kew, 2072, 2216; a total of 33981 men and 39277 women.
25 MacPherson, 'Woman's Work in Victoria', pp. 203-205. Mrs MacPherson was a Edinburgh School of Cooking graduate who gave lectures at the Athenaeum in 1879.
Female relatives and widows retreated from business from the start of the industrial revolution. The home and the workplace were increasingly separate and being able to keep one's womenfolk out of business became a matter of status. Generally, what is known as the 'separation of home and workplace' began, first, in London among the most prosperous trading families. The less prosperous and those in the towns followed but it was a "long, drawn out, and uneven process".27

The transition from pre-capitalist, family-centred commerce to capitalist, labour market commerce and bureaucracy in Victoria followed the English pattern. Married women's official involvement in commerce was mostly in rural areas by the 1850s and mostly in retailing. Victorian commerce, according to the censuses, was male and urban. Nearly 5% of all males, but only 0.9% of all women, were listed as commercially occupied in 1857. Three-quarters of males listed as commercially occupied were resident in the urban electorates of Bourke, which encompassed Melbourne, and Geelong. By contrast, less than one-third of commercial women were in the Bourke district and only 41% were in any municipality. Most women in commerce recorded in the 1854 and 1857 censuses were not paid employees but country shop and storekeepers, dealers and hawkers who made up four-fifths of women officially in the commercial sector.

The incidence of paid female labour in commerce in Victoria was slower than in England, however. In 1857, there were only 256 waged female commercial workers in all of Victoria.28 This was at a time when there was a desperate shortage of lower white collar labour. Advertisements informed the public that urban drapers' establishments would close or remain open on the

28 Census of Victoria, 1857, Occupations of the People, Tables III-X.
basis of whether or not its "young men were off to the goldfields". Despite women's cheapness, they were not employed. Instead, Caroline Chisholm reported that "some" women, whose husbands were at the diggings, had set up "little shops" in Melbourne to maintain themselves and their children. "Little shops" and hawking required little capital so it is not surprising that officially 30% of those engaged in hawking in Melbourne in 1857 were women. There were numerous stories of women hawkers. Mrs Tabitha Ball, for example, returned to the Vaughan diggings after a visit to England with some goods she thought would sell well. Her entrepreneurialship led eventually to the establishment of Ball and Welch, a successful Melbourne department store.29

Single, deserted or widowed women proprietors increasingly established themselves in Victoria during the nineteenth century in particular "traditional" sectors.30 The census data - which is not strictly compatible - reports the proportion of women in the category of shopkeepers, retailers and pedlars as 18% in 1857 and 1861, and 13% in 1871.31 The 1881 census does not differentiate clearly between working and dealing. Women made up 13% of dealers who were employers or who were working on their own account in 1891, 15% in 1901 and 1911, and 16% in 1921. According to the Sands and McDougall directory, women made up an average of 12% of the shop proprietors in 14 major Melbourne retail sectors in 1881.32 There was a

---

29 Age, 6 September 1934.
30 ibid., from the Port Phillip Separate Merchants and Settlers Almanac, Melbourne, 1846, which revealed that the majority of the 14 women business proprietors were married, possibly widowed or deserted; there were five milliners or bonnet makers, three cooks and confectioners, two boarding house keepers, three teachers and one miniature portrait painter. The almanac for 1847 cites a Collingwood woman grocer, J. J. Mouritz, comp. Port Phillip Almanac and Directory, Melbourne, 1847.
31 Census of Victoria, 1871, Table IX.
32 Sands and McDougall Directory, Melbourne, 1881: retail book stores, 8 women were proprietors or 7%; butchers, 14 or 3%; confectioners and pastrycooks, 154 or 34%; retail boot, 14 or 2%; retail chemists, 4 or 3%; drapers, 71 or 21%; fancy repositories, 44 or 40%; fishmongers, 1 or 3%; fruiterers and greengrocers, 99 or 26%; furniture dealers, 10 or 11%; grocers and provision dealers, 128 or 15%; ironmongers, 6 or 5.2%; pawnbrokers, 9 or 11%; tobacconists, 8 or 6%.
slight increase in 1891 which was attributable to an increase in confectionery and pastry shop proprietorship. According to the directory, by 1933 women made up 30% of Melbourne proprietors in the same 14 retail sectors, with the majority of this growth in small confectionery and pastry shops.

One can only guess at married women’s participation, without direct monetary reward, doing the books and working behind familial shop counters. It is impossible to determine the extent of women’s unpaid familial labour from the censuses. Desley Deacon has described the deliberate refusal to acknowledge women’s unpaid economic contribution in the census from 1891 as ‘political arithmetic’. Butchers’ wives assisting in shops, for example, were ignored in 1891. In 1871, 490 wives or 12% of "butcher, meat salesman and assistant" were recorded, in addition to 24 paid female assistants. In 1881, 679 wives or 16% of males were recorded and 43 assistants. In 1891, however, only 112 women or 2% of the occupation were recorded and these were mainly young female cashiers. In the 1881 census, all wives and relatives 15 and over who were living with a shopkeeper were presumed to be assisting. In the 1891 census, to be classified assistants, all female kin had to state explicitly that they were so employed. Women doing their husband’s books part-time and many women assisting in shops at busy times were just not recorded in any of these censuses.

Literary evidence indicates that there was a significant difference in married women’s active participation in business between town and country. Size and type of business also affected participation. In the 1880s, it was common for wives and daughters to work without wages in small urban shops but not in the larger shops. Sons were called upon less often. John Fryer, a Carlton bootseller, for example, was asked by Royal Commissioners in 1882 if he

---

33 For some examples of bank officer’s wives participation in the establishment of the bank branch system in the nineteenth century, see Australasian Insurance and Banking Record, 22 August 1938, p. 682, ‘Woman’s Part in Australian Banking’.
employed assistants in his shop which was open from eight in the morning to
nine at night. He replied:

None but my own family; it is one of the small shops...I have serving in
the shop, when occasion requires, myself, wife and three daughters,
sometimes a son also; that would be only on Saturdays.34

On the other hand, Mamie Graham did not do her merchant husbands' books
despite living in a cottage adjacent to the Melbourne merchant store and
counting house for a number of years. She was occupied with her family;
she was probably pregnant from marriage until menopause giving birth to 18
babies as well as having numerous miscarriages. 35

While one can guess at the extent and trend of familial labour, the censuses
accurately report a growing number of paid women shop and office workers.
By 1891, 9.4% of the commercial sector was female, a drop from 11% in
1857, but the composition between female retailers and shop assistants was
inverting in the commercial sector. In 1891, the commercial sector was
composed of 4% of female employers and women working on their own
account but a larger proportion, 6%, of female wage and salary earners. A
comparison using the Sands and McDougall data shows the expansion in
female shop proprietorship after 1881 was dwarfed by the expansion in paid
shop assistants. While 470 female retailers in the 1881 directory was not
much less than the number of paid female shop assistants, 2791 women
retailers in 1933 were far outnumbered by 11159 female shop assistants in
Melbourne.

During the 1880s, however, something more than simply an increase in the
numbers of women in paid labour began. A dramatic change for future
female employment occurred. Up until the 1880s, women were employed

---

34 Royal Commission on Employees in Shops, 1883, Minutes, clauses 1728-29, John Fryer,
Carlton boot shop.
35 Sally Graham, Pioneer Merchant: The Letters of James Graham 1839-54, Melbourne,
under policies that employers simply drifted into. In the 1830s, wives had worked in drapery shops and now women were paid to do so. During the 1880s, as the numbers of women in paid employment increased, they also entered new areas. By 1890, employers were developing deliberate policies on feminization: they were designating certain jobs in department stores and shops for young, single, middle class and educated women. The public service illustrates both the qualitative and quantitative dimensions to this female employment transition. The Government was a leading employer of women in offices in the nineteenth century. Three phases characterize women's experience in Australian public services: the employment of employees' wives and widows; the employment of unmarried women related or well-connected to public servants; and the employment of meritorious middle class women.

The first women in the public service owed their official positions to wifehood or widowhood and custom. All widows were eligible for male rights in the Victorian Railways Mutual Benefit Society, established in 1866, if they were employed by the department within six months of their husband's deaths. They also had to be in good health and to be under 40 years of age. The department only employed gate or station keepers' widows. Wifehood enabled these women married to public servants access to acquire skills and experience. Often the positions the men held required a wife's unofficial labour. Not only did employing deceased employees' relatives fulfil traditional obligations to widows, but it was often most convenient to the department for these women with skills and experience to stay in positions that were in small, more unattractive, country posts.

36 For example, in Western Australia in 1848, Mrs MacFaul was Government Printer for a period after her husband’s death; Dircksey C. Cowan, 'Women and the Civil Service from 1829 to 1929', Civil Service Journal, 20 July 1919, p. 93. Elise Barney became postmistress of the Queensland General Post Office upon the death of her husband from 1858 until 1864 when it was decided a woman ought not to hold such a prominent position; Desley Deacon, in Heather Rady, ed., 200 Australian Women: A Redress Anthology. Sydney, 1988, pp. 16-17.
Women's employment in the Victorian Post and Telegraph Department began with their serving behind counters, delivering mail and acting as agencies for the post office, banks and other institutions in country districts. William Howitt met such a "lady" keeping a tent store with her husband about six miles out of Melbourne in 1853. She was selling groceries and hardware as well as delivering the mail. There were few post offices outside Melbourne in the 1850s and 1860s which had a revenue exceeding the cost of the postmasters' allowance and the cost of mail conveyance. There was a financial incentive to get cheap efficient labour: women began to be appointed in their own right. When the postal and telegraph services were integrated, country postmistresses employed by the Post and Telegraph Department from 1870 became civil servants. By 1880, over half of the Victorian post and telegraph offices were managed by women. A patronage system operated. Some of these 'poor little country postmistresses' owed their position to the intercessions of influential men. Henry Handel Richardson's mother's patron was Sir Henry Cuthbert, the Postmaster General. He arranged for her to be appointed to a Victorian country town post office on a salary of £72 in 1878 which was increased to £120 when she was promoted the next year.

In the second phase, the emphasis of patronage changed to finding employment for unmarried employees' daughters. The frequency of applications for support by relatives of dead or disabled public servants worried the Victorian government and in 1871 it considered two alternatives.

---

37 William Howitt, Land, Labour and Gold, London, 1855, p. 299. In 1859 the Post Office employed 88 postmasters or clerks and 244 postal agents who were mostly storekeepers, Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Enquire into and Report upon the Civil Service of the Colony, 1859, p. 134, VPP, 1859-60, 3

38 The postmaster's salary was generally a quarter "of the collections" while Heathcote was one of the "very few" paying it's entire way: it earned more than £100. Reports of the Inspector of Country Post Offices, 1, 4 December 1856, Post Master-General records, AA, MP 311/9.


Victoria could implement the 'American system' of insurance or it could adopt the 'French system' of employing "widows and sometimes the daughters of deceased civil servants" in female departments. The Postal and Telegraph Departments were singled out as potential departments for female dependents of deceased public servants. Employees did not have to die before their daughters could get jobs, nor was any single department designated female, however. Increasing numbers of young, unmarried females began to be employed by the Victorian Postal and Telegraph Departments on the basis of overseas precedents. The Post Office began what it described as a social and economic "experiment" in 1877 with the appointment of young unmarried female sorters in the General Post Office.

In a third phase, from the 1880s, the government patronage system was revoked and competitive recruitment was established. The Post and Telegraph Department began what it described in its 1880 official report as a new regime of providing temporary "employment of young women" on the basis of merit rather than a "feeling of sympathy" for widows and genteel poor. The young girls tended to be still 'genteel poor'; the Victorian Parliament was told as late as 1889 that giving indigent "young ladies" public service employment literally kept them off the streets. There was "no better place, as a rule" than the public service for a poor "young lady" forced to earn her own living. The single women who entered the public service from the 1880s in urban settings were not necessarily employees' relatives; they were well connected middle class women who had to give evidence of good moral

41 Victorian Parliamentary Debate (VPD), 1871, 12, p. 646, C. Gavin Duffy responding to John MacGregor.
43 Deputy Postmaster-General, 'Employment of Females in the Post Office and Telegraph Department', in Report Upon the Affairs of the Post Office and Telegraph Department, 1880, pp. 21-22, VPP, 1880-81, 4.
44 VPD, 1889, 60, p. 43, Duncan Gillies.
character. Most significantly, however, they had to pass competitive entry qualifications.

By 1890, there were over 368 women permanently employed by the Post and Telegraph Department. Although the largest group of these women was suburban and country postmistresses (151), from 1870 women's paid clerical employment was expanding. The Post Office and Telegraph Department was quite emphatic that it wanted young female assistants who were employed on a distinct basis. The Department did not want to be accused of tempting women into a career path which would take them away from the family. Employed at a minimum of 18 years of age, women were placed in a classification of their own. Boys could be appointed at 13 as telegraph messengers with five annual incremental steps and were eligible for promotion to assistant clerks or assistant telegraph operators. A female assistants' wage scale in 1883, however, only progressed for three and a half years. It was made quite clear that if a female assistant married she had to resign from the service. Women were discouraged from permanent and responsible positions by policies such as marriage bars which ensured a high female turnover.

While single women's employment was becoming acceptable by the 1880s, then, restrictions on married women's employment were formalized. A dichotomy was developing between married women's business involvement

---

45 Report of Post and Telegraph Department, 1891, p. xix, VPP, 1892-3, 2; there were 401 women by 1891 or 13.4% of the department, compared to 12.9% in 1890.
46 Women continued to be employed in country postal positions. In 1901, of 533 female post officers, postmistresses, clerks and sorters, 430 (80%) were outside Melbourne and its suburbs. At the same time, the employment of women in the Railway Department continued: there were 157 employee's wives in charge of stations and 45 employees' wives "etc" in charge of gates- 2% of the permanent employees in 1901. Census of Victoria, 1901, Occupations of the People, Table 2.
47 Regulations Relating to the Employment of Telegraph Messengers, Letter Carriers, Stampers, Sorters, Female Assistants, Line Repairers etc. Approved by the Governor in Council, 5 March 1883, pp. 6-7.
and the young, single, business girl's working for salary or wages. The Public Service Amending Act of 1889 empowered the Public Service Board to make regulations to facilitate "the employment of women in departments where their service may be deemed advisable". Significantly, the Act also provided that no married woman was "to be eligible for appointment to any office and a single woman already in office who marries [was..] ipso facto out of the service". The conditions of employment for telegraph operators have been noted and it had already been a common practice for private sector saleswomen's agreements to have "let out" clauses in the event of marriage. There was little protest at such provisions except from the married women affected. In 1889, the Education Department informed married women teachers that their employment would be terminated. After exempting one women whose husband was a 'non-providing drunkard', the Minister of Education was inundated with petitions from married women seeking exemption on the grounds they, too, had non-providing drunks for husbands. The Minister decided that there should be no exceptions. At the beginning of the era of the single business girl there was a high degree of agreement among young business women that married women should retire to reduce competition for unmarried women.

From the 1880s, the youth of the women recruited into shop and office jobs distinguished them clearly from their predecessors. In 1891, the majority-63%- of women described as commercial were aged 25 and over. A dualism was developing, however, between the older and the newer occupations. The women in the well-established women's commercial employments of shopkeepers, shopwomen, dealers and hawkers were overwhelmingly older

48 Age, 14 June 1889.
49 Bright and Hitchcocks, London Letters, 1877-81, 6 April 1878, memorandum between Bright and Hitchcocks and Harriet Weedon.
50 Age, 7 March 1894. For an earlier discussion on married women public servants, see VPD, 1889, 60, pp. 429-31, James Munro, J. H. McColl, Charles Young, Dr William Maloney and Charles Smith.
women: 78% were 25 and over. Similarly, the average age of a postmistress was 31 in 1890. By contrast, 75% of commercial travellers and undefined saleswomen (mainly in the universal providers), 61% of women clerical workers, 78% of women telegraph and telephone operators and 49% of women typists, were 24 or under.

This transition cannot be understood merely in terms of lowered fertility and surplus young middle class women. The transition could not have occurred without vocational training developments. Qualifications were replacing familial recommendations in relation to young women's employment in anything other than domestic service or a factory. The family remained important. It was 'genteel poor' families which had both the motivation to have their daughters working and the resources to allow their daughters to acquire vocational qualifications.

Younger, single, middle class and educated women knock on doors

While employers were initially diffident about employing women, there were women who were very keen to have jobs. In the 1870s and 1880s, women were not "given" the new shop and clerical jobs, nor were they conscripted. Employers did not need to advertise for female shop assistants or clerks in the newspaper professional columns as they had to for men. Women went knocking on doors. Young, middle class women took advantage of labour market opportunities that were not designed for their benefit. By 1889, the prejudice against women "even those of gentle birth and breeding, working for their bread" was said to be fading. Most of these women went knocking on doors of clerical employers armed with qualifications: "they ha[d], as a rule,

---

51 Statistical Register of Victoria, 1890, Blue Book.
52 Census of Victoria, 1891, Occupations of the People, Table VIII.
passed some examination or another, which gave them a defined status....".53

These young women's temerity must be placed in the context of the late nineteenth century reform movement. Liberalism, which advocated using the State to promote aspects of social justice, was taking hold of Melbourne and with it a campaign for the education of girls on the same basis as for boys. Since Wollstonecraft, groups of women and men had been advocating the rights of women to education and the benefits that would accrue to society should women have the same rights and freedoms as their brothers.54 Some sections of the women's movement demanded educational facilities and increased employment opportunities so that women, particularly, in the 1880s, indigent, single, meritorious women from a wealthier background, could become economically independent and not lose status in the process.

In the 1870s and 1880s, there was a training and qualification mania in Melbourne. Formal state teacher training began in Melbourne in 1855 but was suspended between 1859 and 1870. In 1870, 57 trainees were enrolled at the Central Training Institution. Although the avenue to teaching for most continued to be a classroom apprenticeship as a pupil-teacher, the numbers accredited increased up to the establishment of the Teachers' and Schools' Registration Board in 1905. To gain registration, teachers required appropriate qualifications. Support for accreditation in 1889 led the Melbourne Institute of Plain Needlework to urge the Education Department to require even sewing mistresses to pass a standard test to win a diploma.55 There was also a movement to professionalize nursing. "Lady probationers" at Melbourne hospital had to work 12 to 14 hour days caring for the sick.

53 Age, 23 February 1889.
54 Mary Wollstonecraft, Vindication of the Rights of Woman, Middlesex, 1985, first published 1792.
55 Age, 14 December 1889.
They were ward maids as well, performing "the roughest tasks in which domestic servants are employed".\textsuperscript{56} They did not need to be specially trained; indeed, nurses were "in the main elderly women with years of experience". Organized training for nurses began in Melbourne in the 1880s, twenty years after Florence Nightingale opened St Thomas' training school in London.\textsuperscript{57} Opportunities for some young, educated women meant the end of opportunities for some older 'uneducated' women.

Education provided new opportunities as well as professionalization of existing employments. Girls gained access, for instance, to government and university qualifications. Boys were able to compete in public matriculation examinations from 1858 and leading commercial and public service jobs depended on good matriculation results. In 1870, women could not matriculate at university and sitting for the civil service exam was seen as an alternative. The Premier, Sir James McCulloch, promised to remedy any difficulty preventing women from being civil service examination candidates.\textsuperscript{58} Less enthused, the Treasurer told the Victorian Parliament in 1872 there were no formal restrictions placed upon girls sitting for government examinations under the Civil Service Act.\textsuperscript{59} Nor were women prohibited from attending commercial training courses. Fees, of course, restricted students in terms of class.

Women were permitted to sit for the matriculation examinations from 1871 and schools with academic curriculum began to be established.\textsuperscript{60} Richard

\textsuperscript{56} ibid., 4 May 1889.
\textsuperscript{57} Mary E. Webster, 'The History of Trained Nursing in Victoria', \textit{Victorian Historical Magazine}, 19/4, December 1942, p. 123. Courses were instituted at Alfred Hospital from 1881, Children's Hospital in 1886 and Melbourne Hospital in 1890.
\textsuperscript{58} \textit{VPD}, 1871, 12, pp. 212-213, Sir James McCulloch responding to W. M. K. Vale's question.
\textsuperscript{59} ibid., 1872, pp. 687-8, Edward Langton responding to T. M. B Philipp's question.
\textsuperscript{60} Majorie Theobald, "Mere Accomplishments'? Melbourne's Early Ladies' Schools Reconsidered', \textit{History of Education Review}, 13/2, 1984, pp. 15-28. Women were not admitted to Melbourne University, however, until 1881.
Budd established a matriculation coaching school for "young ladies" in Melbourne in 1874, thirty years after Queen's College, the first similar establishment had been founded in London. The Presbyterian Ladies' College (PLC) was established in the next year, Tintern Ladies' College in 1877 and Melbourne Methodist Ladies' College in 1882. These girls' schools charged fees comparable to the great boys' colleges which had been founded a generation earlier. These schools' principals also had a narrow view of what jobs their pupils would work in. Charles Pearson told two hundred women attending his inaugural PLC lecture that fathers could not prevent their daughters' traditional lives being affected by the sewing machine, cheap mass produced factory products or ideas of equality. He and a number of others argued that it was women's right to compete on equal terms with men for careers open to talents. The careers he envisaged for his pupils were in the professions or as "governesses, as teachers in schools, or as writers for the press". In the 1870s, young women gained higher educational qualifications at Melbourne's secondary schools that they would or could not use in the commercial workforce. By 1880, a quarter, or 188, of the candidates for matriculation were females. A quarter of those passing matriculation were young women and the majority of women were PLC-educated. Nearly 40%, or 105, of those passing the civil service exam in 1880 were women.

Higher education did not produce a vanguard of women graduates who agitated for non-traditional employment opportunities, however. Certainly, after gaining access to university degrees in 1881, university-educated

---

62 Scotch in 1854, Melbourne Grammar in 1858, Wesley in 1866 and Xavier in 1879.
65 *Age*, 30 December 1880.
Melbourne women pioneered some new areas of white collar employment. Ada Fenton, the daughter of a solicitor, was educated at Ormiston College, studied dentistry and was articled in 1891 to a dentist she married. The then Mrs Tovell completed her degree in 1900 and set up her practice in Collins Street.66 Margaret Whyte and Grace Stone graduated in medicine in 1891, Gräta Grieg in law in 1903 and so on. In Victoria, however, there were only 108 women graduates from the University of Melbourne by 1900 and the majority of these became teachers.67 Unlike in England, there was no Society for the Promotion of the Employment of Women in Victoria.68 The women's movement in Victoria supported higher education and vocational training but did not loudly advocate opening up new sectors of women's shop and office employment in the 1880s.

The women entering shop and office work were not university-educated or prominent in the women's movement. Humbler developments in secondary education and vocational training are the backdrop to the rising number of shop and office workers. The correlation noted above between the presence of white collar workers, residential location in the southern and eastern suburbs, lower fertility and a preponderance of women can be extended to include a concentration of private schools. 122 or 37% of all private schools in Victoria were in Prahran, Emerald Hill, St Kilda, Brighton, Hawthorn and Kew.69 These schools were small, catering for 15% of private school pupils in Victoria (most of the large private schools were Catholic). Parents of limited resources were prepared to spend them on girls' education.

Developments in state schools also indicate the background of women in the new shop and office hierarchies. The 1872 Act providing free, secular primary education did not create any revolution in education, but it did signal the rise in frequency of attendance of girls.\(^\text{70}\) This was carried over to schooling over 13. Although the first state secondary school was not established until 1905, education was provided for those 13 and over before then. By 1881, more girls 13 and over than boys were registered as attending state day schools.\(^\text{71}\) Moreover, there were twice as many students 15 and over attending state schools than private schools in the 1880s.\(^\text{72}\) Parents of these state-educated children indicated their wish for their children to be taught useful commercial skills: in 1881, 928, and in 1889, 1160, state school pupils took bookkeeping as an extra subject for which their parents paid additional fees. In 1881, a metropolitan inspector suggested that mensuration and bookkeeping be placed on the "programme of free instruction for the sixth [or highest] class". At a time when most children left school at 13 in a competitive labour market, the difference between shop girls and factory girls often lay in an extra year or two at school.

By the end of the 1880s, not only office employers but shop employers had a certificate with which to compare applicants. The 1872 Act instituted the standard certificate. Children passing the standard exam were exempt from attending school and it was the factory inspector's job to make sure young people working in factories had the exemption. In 1889, only 3.5% of those sitting for exemption were in the 6th or highest class. From 1890, a merit


\(^{71}\) Report of the Minister of Public Instruction, 1881-2, p. v, VPP, 1882-3, 3, and 1889-90, p. 26, VPP, 1890, 3. In 1890, there 182 government schools in Victoria with 20892 boys and 21836 girls, 13 and over, officially attending.

\(^{72}\) ibid., 1889-90. In 1889, for example, there were 9140 state students 15 and above while there were 4467 were at private schools. Unfortunately, the private school data is not disaggregated for 6 to 15 year olds.
certificate system was instituted for 6th class students. Charles Pearson, the Minister of Education, intended it to afford "evidence of diligence, steadiness, and intelligence" and he expected it to "serve as a passport to employment".\textsuperscript{73} It proved to be "highly valued".\textsuperscript{74} As one of my informants told me "what you became usually reflected your parents' ability to educate you": four years' secondary schooling to 17 meant you could become a teacher, if your parents could also afford to keep you while you trained you could become a nurse, two or three years' education after 13 "got you into an office", but if you had to leave after the Merit Certificate you became a shopgirl, and if you didn't get the Merit you became a factory-worker.\textsuperscript{75}

In the 1880s, the female shop and office recruits came from the ranks of girls educated from standard certificate to matriculation. Young women, such as Mary Swifte, came from families which were economically precarious but managed a secondary education for their girls. Swifte's French-born father arrived in Tasmania in the 1840s and established a "College for Sons of Gentlemen" in Launceston. When her mother died Swifte went to Melbourne to live with her father's sister, Mrs Oldfield, and trained to type at Stott's typewriting agency.\textsuperscript{76} Similarly, 21 year old Catherine Baynes, the youngest of 12 children, matriculated, but her solicitor father could not afford to send her to university so in 1886 she took a job as postmistress at Linton.\textsuperscript{77} Miss McAuley, a 17 year old educated at Grace Park House, Hawthorn, spent six years as a governess before being appointed in 1888 as a Melbourne

\textsuperscript{73} ibid., p. xxiv.
\textsuperscript{74} ibid., 1890-91, p. xviii, \textit{VPP}, 1891, 4.
\textsuperscript{75} Ellen Greenlaw (pseudonym), work history.
\textsuperscript{76} ANZ Banking Group Archives, interview with Mary Swifte's niece, 22 August 1986.
\textsuperscript{77} Interview with Mrs Catherine Scantlebury's grand-daughter, Mrs Cath James, 23 September 1988. Baynes was determined her daughters would go to university; she married Dr Scantlebury: their son George became a doctor, Vera became a doctor, Mrs Dorothy Wardle became headmistress of school in Toorak, and Ethel married a doctor. I am grateful to Mrs James for a copy of the Clark (Baynes' maternal) family history, \textit{Some Account of the Clark Family}, n.d., Melbourne, c.1925, pp. 28-31.
Margaret Riggs was one of eight children who stayed at school until she was 15. Her father was a civil servant at Beechwood where there were few employment opportunities so she went to Melbourne in 1888 and was introduced to Foy and Gibson's manager by a friend.

These young women were the lucky ones. Others could not find jobs. Sidney Stott's first women graduates had to set up their own typewriting agencies to service mostly legal firms for they could not find regular jobs. Women joined classes such as Stott's shorthand classes in numbers far exceeding job opportunities.

Telegraphy offers some good examples of the enthusiasm of young middle class women to make use of the provision of extra-workplace vocational training. Up to the 1870s, the usual method of training for males was employment as a young telegraph messenger. Country offices were described as the "schools" for male operators. The Age newspaper noted that telegraphy rapidly became women's work when general vocational training began. When the trustees of the Victorian Public Library and National Museum advertised a telegraphy class in March 1872, 12 women entered and paid fees. No men entered, although the course was targeted at them. In 1881, amid criticism of the number of women it was recruiting, the Post Office decreased by one the number of women it employed. The Library-Museum telegraphy course was suspended. In 1882, however, it

---

79 *Service*, 13 October 1948, pp. 4-5. Margaret Riggs was unusual in going on to work 62 years at the Foy and Gibson store.
81 *Royal Commission Appointed to Enquire into the State of the Public Service and the Working of the Civil Service Act..., 1873*, Minutes of Evidence, clause 6970, William Turner, Deputy Postmaster-General, *VPP*, 1873, 2.
82 *VPD*, 1882, 39, p. 158, Henry Bolton, Postmaster-General responding to remarks by G. D. Langridge.
was recommenced because of popular female demand. Moreover, in the interim the Ballarat School of Mines had established telegraphy courses. A "large number" were said to have attended these courses. The Postmaster-General warned the public that the number of women already qualified as female operators in 1882 far exceeded the department's requirements for "several years to come". Simply being competent would not guarantee employment.83

**Revolutionary change?**

It was predicted that the typewriter and the emporium would have a revolutionary impact on the sexual division of labour. In 1886, for example, Edmund Parkes, Superintendent of the Melbourne Bank of Australasia, hired Mary Swifte to operate the bank's new early model Remington typewriter. Parkes reported to his London secretary that the "new machine" at the pressing of one key could take three carbon copies".84 Hitherto, a copy was made using a copying press. This required sheets of blotting paper to be soaked overnight and put on top of a penned document and put through a press. Better copies had simply to be made by hand. Copying clerks were employed on a casual basis by many businesses especially for legal work which cost 3d. to 4d. a folio in the 1870s and 1880s. Parkes saw the opportunity for males, with the new feminized technology:

> The purely mechanical work of copying letters of which the work of my office so largely consists is a poor training for youths who should be learning banking business and I therefore think that it would be advantageous to employ female labour instead.85

Similarly, the Melbourne editor of the *Journal of the Bankers' Institute of Australasia* was expecting a glut of competition from women because the

---

83 Report of Post Office and Telegraph Department, 1881, p. 20, VPP, 1882-3, 2.
85 'Female Employment 1887-1930', unpublished research paper, ANZ Banking Group Archives, Parkes to Selby, 15 April 1887, AB 28 S/L 2455.
clerical market was "overstretched" and clerical duties were "light".\textsuperscript{86} Despite the obvious utility of typists, only two or three female typists were employed in any bank until 1914. Many non-managerial male staff had to qualify as typists and from 1910 typing was assessed as part of the regular staff reports of the Bank of Australasia.

The emergence of the emporium or department shop was also considered to augur well for women's employment. The attraction of departmentalized shops was the large amount of merchandise displayed with prices clearly marked which reduced the consultation between sales staff and browsing customers. The Collins Street Equitable Co-operative Society management encouraged customers to "look around" its shop and its turnover increased. The introduction of new methods and sales required quick sales staff. In 1887, the Equitable's staff was "taxed to their utmost capacity and still not able to serve quickly enough".\textsuperscript{87} The store grew and took on more staff. Some departments, such as drapery, were considered women's work which augured well for women's employment. By the 1880s, large shops such as the Mutual Store had waiting lists of women wanting employment.

The answer to why there were not more women in shops and offices lies partly in technology and organization. There was an interval between the invention and adoption of technical aids such as typewriters and shorthand. The technology of typing was still crude, and it was adopted only slowly in Australia by the largest clerical employers. None of the state-employed women was a typist.\textsuperscript{88} Indeed, not until the early twentieth century (1905) was a directive issued for any government work to be typewritten. The Crown

\textsuperscript{86} \textit{Journal of the Bankers Institute of Australasia}, September 1890, p. 89.
\textsuperscript{87} \textit{Age}, 7 June 1887.
\textsuperscript{88} There were only two female typists employed by the State by 1898, one in the Lands and one in the Post and Telegraph departments; less than 1\% of women clerks, \textit{Public Service Board's Report}, 1899, p. 6.
Solicitor was an innovator with his appointment of a male typist in July 1884 and another in October 1886. Moreover, the typewriter may have been invented in 1873 but the typewriter industry developed slowly. In the 1880s, the typewriter was a noisy contraption. It was not until 1893 that Underwood manufactured the first successful front-stroke 'visible' machine. Copy-typing or touch typing did not gain currency in Victoria until the first decade of the twentieth century. Most typists were correspondence-typists who were required to have a general business knowledge. Similarly, Pitman's brother had imported shorthand textbooks into Australia in the 1850s but shorthand was not in common practice until the turn of the century. The first task of the Australasian Institute of Shorthand Writers as Justice Higginbotham its president told the inaugural Melbourne meeting in 1880, was simply to popularize shorthand amongst men.89

Commentators had exaggerated the impact of the first wave of technology in Victoria. Contrary to Parkes' opinion above, accounts generated the bulk of the work in many businesses such as banks and insurance companies. Recording, processing and checking figures were the most labour-consuming bank tasks. Mechanical accounting, however, did not occur until a second wave of technology in the twentieth century. Ledger-posting machines, remittance or cheque auditing machines and adding-tabulating machines like comptometers were not introduced into banks until 1913.90 Reorganization and new methods continued to be the major innovation. Office innovation in the 1850s in the Chief Secretary's Office was simply a matter of reorganization and delegation of responsibilities.91 The number of letters

89 Age, 18 November 1880. See the 'great' careers for men based on their knowledge of shorthand, Smith, ed., Cyclopedia of Victoria, 1, 1903, pp. 179-182 and 236.
90 The Australasian Insurance and Banking Record, 21 November 1930, pp. 949-51, 'Mechanisation in Banking'.
received annually increased from 2412 to 17499 but the Chief Secretary did not introduce a letter-press until 1870.92 Basic methods such as double entry accounting were innovations in insurance offices in the 1880s.93 Office systems and time-saving devices, even card ledgers, only slowly became commonplace Australian business practice.94 There was such diversity in business 'systems' that it was considered to be "difficult" to write a textbook that young people could be profitably taught from.95 Traditional recruitment policies remained associated with these traditional methods.

The degradation, expansion and feminization of clerical and retail labour in Victoria in the late nineteenth century were not a single phenomenon. Women were not merely going into the largest expanding offices which had the latest technology and methods and the most advanced division of labour. Indeed, some of the largest growing clerical employers- the railways department, the banks and insurance companies- were not employing large groups of women. Reducing labour costs amid expansion was not the whole story of feminization. Between 1871 and 1881, commercial employment as a whole grew by 30%. The number of government clerks and accountants grew by 70%. Telegraphy employment more than doubled while railway work apart from construction more than tripled.96 Women, however, were only employed in significant numbers in telegraphy. Indeed, the feminization pattern was very uneven. Certainly, the banks, insurance companies and the largest Flinders Street merchants did not employ women in large numbers until the later popularity of the typewriter. Even then, as will become evident, the largest offices did not have a monopoly over employing women: the Age

92 Royal Commission on the Public Service 1873. Minutes, clause 147, Thomas Ware, Chief Clerk, Chief Secretary's Office.
93 Australasian Insurance and Banking Record, 11 June 1900, p. 469.
96 Census of Victoria, 1871 and 1881, Occupations of the People, Tables XXV and IV respectively.
observed that in 1893, that the typist "had come into immense popularity, equally with the dapper young architect and the mammoth importing firm".97 Even given women's cheapness and efficiency, employers were uneven in their acceptance of female labour. In 1880, for example, while the Collins Street Melbourne Telephone Exchange was inaugurated by a female staff of 8, boys were employed at the Sydney exchange until 1887.98 Women were slow to enter shop and office employment in the 1880s because there was much diffidence over employing women in the general community.

Some younger, single and educated women went knocking on doors but only a few were opened to them. The numbers indicated above from the 1891 Victorian census hardly constituted a revolution in women's employment. One obstacle was the debate in the 1880s over middle class women's employment which took some time to resolve. Waged shop and office labour held a woman's character up to question. The debate over the respectability of women working in shops and offices was couched in terms of their marrying, bearing healthy children and settling down into domestic work. This is understandable since the new recruits, in the main, were younger, single women who were expected to work a short while before making a respectable marriage. The sexual division of labour ideology operating on both sides of the labour market, supply and demand, served to slow down women's entry into shops and offices.

Many supporters of the expansion of educated single women's employment opportunities did not reject the conventional ideas on the sexual division of labour. William Turner, deputy Postmaster-General, conceded, for example, that women telegraph operators performed satisfactorily, but believed they did

97 *Age*, 2 December 1893.
not have the vigour to be managers of large urban offices. Constance Berridge expected to be considered for responsible managerial positions and protested strongly at the lack of promotion opportunities for women. She entered the Postal Department in 1884 aged 23 and made it a life's career; she never married. Women like Berridge continued to urge that educational and employment opportunities for single women be expanded. They did not condone, however, the employment of women as messengers, a progression path for males, because it entailed delivering day and night. Most men and women who supported women working in shops and offices believed in some version of separate spheres.

Great caution was exercised in the employment of young women. Some profits which would have accrued from employing women whose wages were less than men's were sacrificed in the interests of propriety. Women's integration into paid commercial employment in the 1880s occurred within the confines of propriety: women with good manners and middle class habits were selected. The Postmaster-General took pains to emphasize that women's employment would not result in a social revolution. The new clerical staff were not just chosen on the basis of "age, health, aptitude and general capacity". A number were conspicuously "daughters or near relatives of wealthy citizens... there being several instances of two or more members of one family engaged in the same Department". In other words, these were respectable middle class women who came with good references.

Sex segregation constrained the extent of women's employment. Views favouring sex segregation were often shared by the women and their

---

99 Royal Commission on the Public Service, 1873, Minutes, clauses 7059-7064, William Turner.
100 Royal Commission on Postal Services, Minutes of Evidence, 2, clause 41847, Constance Elizabeth Berridge, APP, 1910, 5. 'Employment of Women in the Postal Service' and 'Night Work for Women', AA, 78/1/1221 and 1482, 1907-9.
employers. Women did not enter randomly into shop and office employment hierarchically or spatially. Women were restricted to "women's" sections in shops, millinery and drapery, while manchester, grocery and hardware departments were "men's" sections. Sexual segregation was considered most proper. Employers were paranoid at the intermingling of their new young recruits. Members of the first generation of women were not only placed in separate female departments and rooms, but they left their workplaces by different doors. Already by 1883, some women were working different hours from men in drapers' shops ensuring, while they worked together, men and women did not leave work together.\footnote{Royal Commission on Employees in Shops. Minutes, 1883, clause 2432, Henry Smith, Exhibition Market draper.}

Shopwork was considered to be better than being in service. Unlike in England, paid shopwork in Victoria was not associated with the living in system and was not considered on a par with domestic service whereby staff were housed and fed. One conspicuous exception was the 100 male employees at Bright and Hitchcocks in Geelong 1870. Those not in private accommodation were housed and looked after by a housekeeper at their employers' expense. They ate their meals in a dining room under the shop. All Bright and Hitchcocks' employees, bar the nightwatchmen, were in private accommodation by the 1890s. In Germany, in 1892, about half retail employees still lived in.\footnote{Jurgen Kocka, White-Collar Labour in America 1890-1940. London, 1980, pp. 80-81.}

Department stores had middle class recruitment policies. The larger shops prided themselves on the calibre of their assistants. Bright and Hitchcocks only employed "ladies" and imported them from England. In 1878, Miss Harriet Weedon's first class passage from England was paid for her to take up the position of first saleswoman in the straw goods and millinery department on a three year contract at a salary of £200, including "suitable and
comfortable board and lodging". The firm had got a bargain as she originally wanted a higher salary. She was chosen because she was a "quiet lady like person who had lived four seasons at Vipes" and was a "skilful saleswoman and careful keeper of stock". The firm was hoping to extend her contract for she had no parents or special ties to London. Another woman's contract was in jeopardy in 1877 because she was "flighty" and assumed airs and had disagreements with the female supervisor, Miss Jones. Both these women had been recruited, similarly, from England.

Employers claimed their customers dictated their employment policies. The large departmentalized stores did not employ junior, inexperienced women to serve for they knew that their customers wanted good advice. Ball and Welch 'brought up' some women from the millinery workrooms to serve behind counters on the strength of their knowledge. They dismissed a number of women because they were "unsatisfactory", falling short of being 'perfect business women'. The relationship between the requirements of middle class propriety and retailing was made clear by one policeman who complained of the proliferation of women hawkers in Melbourne in the late 1880s. He considered there was "nothing stranger" than the young women "got up in the attire of nurses" hawking trinkets. There were many complaints because these unlicensed hawkers were "exceedingly pertinacious and forward". Certainly, women shop assistants dressed sombrely. In first class establishments customers were 'received' in show rooms. Often money was not exchanged. Shops, such as Robertson and Moffat, continued to extend credit to all customers up to the 1920s.

103 Bright and Hitchcocks, London Letters, 1877-81, 6 April 1878, ff.
104 Ball and Welch, Outward Letter Books, 1891-1897, references, UOMA. Miss Price, for example, spent 9 years in the workroom and then in "various departments as a saleswoman", 8 July 1893. See also 18 April, 23 July 1892, 8 July 1893, 1 August 1895, 26 March 1897 and 4 May 1897.
105 John Sadleir, Recollections of a Victorian Police Officer, Melbourne, 1913, p. 250.
The concern over the manners, morals and physiques of women in business was revealed in the Royal Commission on Shop Employees which sat between 1882 and 1884. The Commission was established to investigate the early closing question, but it considered the sexual division of labour in some detail. Disquiet was expressed over the number of shop women. Paid shop work was not only tainted with the stereotype of being male, but it was considered arduous. Hard work was anathema to the middle class version of femininity. Despite the history of British factory legislation, it seems to have been a surprise to late nineteenth century Victorian politicians that working women got ill through their work. Suddenly, the insignia of gentility was partially applied to certain working women: hard work had a bad effect on working women. If women had to work, reforms had to be initiated to make it respectable. Reform made working in a shop respectable, although some shop work was marginal. It depended on the shop and one's status in it.

Doctors attested before the Commission that working women's health deteriorated when they began working in factories, shops and bars. Saleswomen, for example, were prone to diseases of "digestive, genital and urinary organs, indigestion, hemorrhoids, constipation, ovarian irritation, neuralgia and painful glandular enlargement" caused by hurried meals and standing up for long hours working under gas lights. In particular, having no access to a toilet led to cases of lapsus uteri.106 There were calls for toilets, seats and shorter hours for shop women.

Worse than this, however, were the moral effects of long hours on women, particularly barmaids. The barmaid's working day- 14 to 16, and in some cases even 18, hours led not only to the "physical disorganization" common to women working generally but, allegedly, to immorality. George Brown Hill,

city police court visitor, described the barmaid's almost inexorable syphilitic
death: publicans lured attractive, respectable girls with high wages into hotels
which were really brothels in disguise. Then, as

soon as a girl gets rather faded in one house she goes to a house of a
lower grade, and down and down, until no publican will have her. The
next time you will find her knocking about Lonsdale-Street or Little
Bourke-street. Then she goes amongst the Chinamen; from thence to
the hospital, and then into the grave. 107

The Royal Commission mirrored popular opinion in its grading of jobs: paid
work in a bar or waitressing were not respectable or genteel, while
employment in the new department stores with short hours was respectable
and could be genteel. Working in an office was the best. The Royal
Commission, however, also reflected the changing stereotypes. A limited
number of employers in the 1880s employed a small number of women in
shops and offices. They challenged the current stereotypes that single,
educated, middle class women should not be employed.

The story outlined of feminization in nineteenth century Victoria goes beyond
the economic-rational account that employers decided to employ unskilled
women in large emporiums and bureaucracies in poorly-paid, insecure,
dead-end jobs because they were cheap. Increased demand for retail and
clerical workers was not the variable explaining women's movement into the
white collar sector. Few women were employed. Those few who were
employed were able, younger, middle class women pioneering small
segregated groups in workplaces.

2.3 Whatever happened to men's jobs? Jobs for the Boys

Large-scale bureaucracies and department stores led to the expansion of
unskilled and poorly-paid jobs. Most of those filling these jobs were young

107 Royal Commission on Employees in Shops. Report on the Employment of Barmaids, 1884,
p. 4, quoting clause 7260 of evidence, V.P.P., 1884, 2. For attitudes towards pregnant
barmaids, see Dr. Beaney, Vindication with Reflections on the Inquest Held Upon the Body of
Mary Lewis, Melbourne, 1870.
men. The main threat to the telegraph officers' status, for instance, did not come, first, from unqualified women on low salaries but from the employment of less qualified and lower paid young males on telegraphic work.108 Victorians in the 1880s were well aware of the secondary labour market for male white collar workers:

we hear of candidates by the score, or even the hundred, drawn from all ranks of life, for any small vacancy advertised, and that the salaries paid in a large number of institutions, public and private, are of the smallest description.109

Indeed, many related a lower marriage rate among the young middle class to overcrowded white collar occupations and to male shop and office workers' low incomes. They asked whether the boys were in a position to marry. Young men's low wages was said to be "foster[ing] their disinclination to matrimony". What was new in the 1880s was that some male workers began to seek guarantees and structures to ensure that their jobs were not dead-end ones.

It is difficult to say whether conditions of employment were worsening. On the one hand, civil servants' enviable conditions were under threat. The Civil Service Commissioners investigating whether the civil service was 'overmanned and overpaid' in 1859 regarded clerical labour as skilled labour.110 Although salaries had hitherto fluctuated, the 1859 Commission recommended that junior officers be paid £150 to £250, assistant officers £275 to £400, senior officers £425 to £575 and principal officers £600 to £800. Clerical labour in Victoria was scarce and the government had to compete with banks and other mercantile offices. Managers of the major banks in 1859 in Melbourne had an average salary of £1800 ranging from £1200 to £2000. Public service rates were comparable to the higher end of the private

---

110 Inquiry into the Civil Service, 1859. pp. 11-12.
sector labour market; public service rates were based upon rates that “intelligent assistants” received in the 14 principal mercantile offices and seven banks in Melbourne. The range of salaries for “inferior officers” in the private sector in Melbourne at that time was said to be £100 to £300. The Government Shorthand Writer earned £800 and, in the 1850s, another £200 in ‘private practice’. His assistant earned £600 and two articled clerks with three years experience who spent their time simply transcribing the notes of their two superiors earned £150. Laughter greeted the proposal that civil servants’ office hours be increased to eight hours a day in 1864, although the increase to seven hours was greeted more soberly. It was stated that the ordinary hours for most civil servants were about 23 or 24 hours a week. In addition, they were conspicuous in having three weeks’ holiday leave and eight days’ sick leave a year, as well as long service leave.111

A different picture emerges, however, in 1873 when the Royal Commission on the Public Service conducted another survey of about 37 leading Melbourne clerical employers.112 The range of bank managers’ salaries had extended and they now varied between £1700 and £3500. The top executives of insurance companies earned on average £900, of merchants’ offices, £460, and of manchester warehouses, £410. A range of poorly-paid, junior positions were surveyed. In 1840, both the Bank of Australasia and the Union Bank in Melbourne had seven staff: a manager, an accountant, a sub-accountant, a teller and three clerks.113 By 1873, clerks were differentiated as ledger keepers, ordinary clerks and junior clerks. While the minimum salary in banks for junior clerks was £50, it was £39 in insurance offices, £25 in merchants’ offices and in manchester warehouses as low as £15, indeed, one “lad” received no salary for six months. The returns emphasized that

111 VPD. 1864, 10, pp. 14, 122, 146-47, John Woods’ motions.
112 Royal Commission on the Public Service. 1873, Appendix L, pp. 110-111.
113 Edmund Finn, The Chronicles of Early Melbourne, 1835 to 1852; historical, anecdotal and personal, by 'Garryowen'. 1, Melbourne, 1888, pp. 321-2.
salaries were determined by age as well as position. Thus, it was explained that two chief clerks in insurance offices received only £300 compared to an average of £450 because they were only 24. Public service commencing salaries were lowered in 1889 on the basis of the lower private sector rates.

Wage structures of specific private sector firms show that a large proportion of clerical labour did not command the nominal rates accorded to skilled workers by the latter part of the nineteenth century. On 1 January 1890, of the 30 employees of the Victorian branch of the Australian Mutual Provident Society, the manager and the accountant earned £1500 and £500 each; 10, or a third of the staff, earned £100 or less including four temporary employees on weekly wages; and 19, or two-thirds of the staff earned £150 or less which was the skilled workers' benchmark. 22 or three-quarters of the staff earned £175 or less. This pattern varied from business to business. Only half of Goldsbrough, Mort and Company's 61 staff in 1893, for instance, earned below the nominal skilled worker benchmark of £150 per annum, the same proportion as in 1885.

Contract and temporary shop and office employment were well-established in Melbourne by the 1880s. Businesses were established with skeleton staffs and contract agencies: in the nineteenth century both banks and insurance companies operated through sub-agencies without large central staffs. In the 1860s, when clerical labour was plentiful again in Melbourne after the goldrushes, many businesses did not employ their own clerks. National Mutual, for example, was founded in 1869, but for the first six years the National Insurance Company of Australasia performed the clerical work for a

114 Australian Mutual Provident Society, Victorian records, branch salaries.
fee. In 1875, one permanent bookkeeper was employed by National Mutual and the balance of the labour was performed by temporary labour when the need arose. The company clerical staff doubled from seven indoor staff in 1876 to 15 head office staff in 1884.\textsuperscript{117} Evidence suggests that seasonal clerical and shop work may also have been a sizeable component of commercial work. A city warehouse in the 1880s, for instance, normally employed 15 shop assistants but this usually rose to 21 at the height of the season. Department store staff varied by about a fifth "according to the season".\textsuperscript{118}

From the perspective of the casual male employee, there may have been some improvement in late nineteenth century Victoria. The unemployment data indicates that in the census years shop and office workers' unemployment fluctuated but that unemployment amongst clerks and commercial workers generally may have been declining before the depression. In 1871, 12.1% of the unemployed were described as commercial, 5.2% as clerks and 6.9% shopkeepers and assistants; in 1881, the figures were 10%, 5.8% and 4.2% respectively; and in 1891, 9.7%, 3.7% and 6.0%. This was at a time when the entire commercial category rose from 5% of the occupational structure in 1871 to 13.6% in 1891.

Rather than an occupational transformation, shop and office workers' position increasingly varied according to their age and the business they were employed in. The modern ratio of male juniors to seniors in large shops and offices was established in the 1870s and 1880s. The number of commercial

\textsuperscript{118} Royal Commission on Employees in Shops, 1883, Minutes, clauses 1644-46, William Eyre, City Warehouse Company, Carlton drapery. Royal Commission Appointed to Investigate and Report on the Operation of the Factories Law of Victoria, 1903, Minutes of Evidence, clause 4812, George Christie, Manager of the Mutual Store, VPP, 1902-3, 2. The Mutual Store staff varied from 290 to 350 in 1901 and this was probably representative of the pattern earlier in the century.
clerks more than tripled in late nineteenth century Victoria with a disproportionate increase in juniors. Despite the hours for juniors, shop and office work was very popular. As one witness to the Commission on shop employees stated in 1883:

Many young people would be much better cutting wood, or in ship building or house building. They prefer wearing a black coat. I might say that that is universally true, but peculiarly applicable to Victoria.  

Department stores' hierarchies expanded rapidly in the 1880s. In May 1881, when it was announced that turnover in April was up a fifth on April 1880, the Manager of the Mutual Store immediately authorized the appointment of four new juniors on one day:

A junior assistant so as to allow one hand to attend to the crockery and keep it in order. A Boy to assist the man calling out orders to Entry clerk. A Junior Clerk so as to conduct 2 Entry Desks instead of one. A Junior Clerk so as to divide the ledgers into 3 sets instead of two.  

Competition amongst these juniors began to intensify. Only a few would win permanent or good appointments as adults. The Age complained about the expanding male secondary labour market in the public service in 1880. It cited 76 young men earning between them £12500 per annum whose main task was "perpetual copying". The public service was advised to invest in some machinery- half a dozen letter presses, at least.  

While the civil service had an age requirement for appointment, the private sector employed 'lads' as messengers. In the absence of formal apprenticeships, these 'lads' were lucky to be promoted to junior clerks or salesmen. These young recruits were poorly-paid. The hours of work were more than eight a day, however, and there were no paid holidays or standard wage increments. They inherited some status symbols. They were paid a salary, for instance. Only a

119 Royal Commission on Employees in Shops, 1883, Minutes, clause 172, John Hindle, Melbourne draper.  
120 Mutual Store Board of Directors, Minute Book, 4 and 11 May 1881.  
121 Age, 20 August 1880.
few were paid weekly wages—7% of Paterson, Laing and Bruce’s workforce in 1883.122

At the same time, prospects for those at the top were enhanced. Ownership and management were being separated. By 1880, the Mutual Store was arranged into departments, but the manager, not the heads of departments, interviewed, appointed and dismissed staff. Decisions were made by the Board of Directors on the basis of the report books of the heads of the departments. During the 1880s, departmental managers won the right to hire and fire staff. The development of salaried employees in running Melbourne businesses was protracted. Departmental managers of Foy and Gibson, a larger store, were not required to write fortnightly reports or to be accountable for daily sales takings until 1900.123

Secure career structures were certainly the main concern of permanent public servants. There were few permanent public servants before 1883. Uncertainty of tenure had been the backdrop to the 1859 inquiry into the public service and the resultant 1862 Public Service Act. The Lands Department was recruiting staff but between July 1854 and January 1856, 741 public servants, or a quarter of remaining departmental staff were dismissed. The 1862 Act instituted entry by examination, progression procedures and security of tenure. The Act was evaded, however, with most appointments being simply made outside the provisions of the Act; by 1882, there were only 1703 officers under the Act while 15843 officers, or nine-tenths of the service, were outside the Act. Civil servants’ lack of security was obvious when more than 100 civil servants were dismissed in January 1878 because of a political supply impasse which was known as ‘Black Wednesday’. One of those retrenched committed suicide. An officer who had

122 Paterson, Laing and Bruce, Salary Books, ABL, 38/18.
123 Foy and Gibson Letterbook, 15 June 1900, UOMA.
worked 14 years in the Lands Department as a supernumerary, was retrenched in 1880 and, along with 30 other discontented retrenched men, he complained to the Chief Secretary that his prospects were grim.

He could either go into a merchant’s office or a bank, but the banks were also retrenching, and in applying for a bookkeepers’ position the other day he found he was one amongst 200 applicants.\(^\text{124}\)

Permanent government employment was prized. Officers classified under the 1862 Act appealed to the Supreme Court in 1889 “to maintain their rights and privileges which they claim[ed] as regards seniority and promotion” had been denied them by the Public Service Board. Put simply, they claimed that the 1884 public service classification did not differentiate between regular plodding career officers and those who had come in "over the wall" on high-paying contracts. The career public servants demanded that they be preferred.\(^\text{125}\) Far from complaining about the degradation of labour in large hierarchies, workers demanded more exclusive regulations and career structures.

The public service occupational structure was completely inverted in 1883. Under the 1862 Act, a mere 18% of the clerical division was in the 5th class, 40% in the 4th class and 43% in the higher classes. Under the 1883 Act, 60% were in the 5th class, 27% in the 4th class and a mere 13% in the higher classes. Hierarchy meant less chance of promotion. In 1882, for example, 92 5th class public service clerks had 432 positions above them while in 1883, 1100 officers had only 745 positions above them.\(^\text{126}\)

Public servants had won security of tenure but not continuous promotion. Only a few were to enjoy the richest fruits of hierarchy; Henry Pitt began work

\(^{124}\) *Age*, 16 October 1880.

\(^{125}\) ibid., 6 May 1889.

\(^{126}\) ibid., 2 July 1889.
in 1888 as a letter copyist in the Treasury Office and fifty years later retired as Under-Treasurer. In the 1880s, an average clerk of 18 entered the service in the 5th class on £80 and rose automatically to £180 in seven years. At 25 he was earning more than a skilled labourer. Advancement beyond that point required promotion into the 4th class, which was not automatic. In the 1890s, the average railway clerk earned the skilled labourers' rate at 26. There was no shortage of applicants for government clerical service security. The numbers of young males wishing to sit the Public Service Clerical Exam mushroomed; applications were thinned by 26% to only four times the 60 positions available by ballot in 1889. Messengers started lobbying for avenues to be made available to them for promotion to the permanent clerical service.

The commercial world was not suddenly rent into primary, hierarchical employment with good conditions and secondary employment with worsening conditions. The developing labour hierarchies must be put into context of a longer term dualism of large and small enterprises. This undermines the consensus among historians that nineteenth century clerical employees and twentieth century clerical employees are not comparable. Nineteenth century clerks are said to be a small elite of well-paid, responsible craft-retainers. Similarly, small-business, skilled nineteenth century retainers often combined production and retailing in contrast to the new retailing emporiums. A new class of secondary labour market workers, a new lower stratum, emerged at the end of the nineteenth century with commercial and bureaucratic expansion. The reality, however, is of a longer term development of secondary and primary male labour market. At one level the wealthier and powerful merchants like F.T. Sargood and James Service were concerned with what to do with their boys who needed to be trained to compete as

127 ibid., 8 March 1889.
128 ibid., 25 May 1887, 26 January, 10 July 1889. VPD, 1889, 60, p. 311, Richard Richardson.
merchants sons in a new commercial world of the 1880s. The less wealthy people were concerned with what to do with their boys who all seemed to aspire to white collar employment in the towns and the metropolis. Most importantly, there was already a male secondary labour market before feminization began to any significant degree.

**Extent of dual labour markets**

Significantly, little work has been done to quantify the extent of new commercial and bureaucratic labour hierarchies. On the basis of size alone, one would expect the development of large hierarchies and the division of labour in Victorian shops and offices to have changed significantly in the course of the nineteenth century. By 1890, Melbourne had grown to become a substantial city ranked 22 on an international urban scale. Commerce was subservient, however, to the import substitution manufacturing sector in the occupational structure, for it made up only 14% by 1891. Melbourne's reputation as a commercial capital and its international urbanizing rating disguises the small scale nature of Victoria's commercial and bureaucratic units.

The largest stores in the 1880s were the universal providers which grew out of the drapers, some of them well-established. The largest provincial stores were Bright and Hitchcocks in Geelong, John Langlands and Sons in Horsham and David Jones in Ballarat which had been established in 1850, 1849 and 1853 respectively. The big Melbourne stores were: Buckley and Nunn established in 1851; James McEwan and Robertson and Moffat in 1852; Ball and Welch which had been established in 1855; Stephens and Sons in 1868; Mutual Store in 1872; Bussell, Robson and Bussell in 1877;

---

Hicks Atkinson and George and George in 1878; and Foy and Gibson in 1882. These shops experienced rapid growth during the 1880s: Bussell, Robson and Bussell, for example, had only 20 employees in 1877 and 100 in 1888. Foy and Gibson had 300 employees by 1884. As Twopenny observed in 1883, these dozen largest stores sold "anything, from a suit of clothes to furniture" and the trend for drapery and hardware stores to sell 'furniture, china and fancy goods' and clothes had only developed from the late 1870s. These shops rightly discarded the term drapers or ironmongers. They were not only importers but manufacturers also. In addition to the big stores, there were about twenty large suburban stores: Treadways "Drapers, General Importers, Manufactures, House Furnishings, Ironmongers and Grocers" store in Collingwood which employed 60 to 70 employees was typical.

Following the stars of the largest enterprises can be deceptive, however. The average store remained small. In the 1891 census, more dealers did not employ labour than did. (10104 compared to 7809). The 7809 dealers employing labour averaged five employees apiece. Although averages are not the point, as one would expect, the general or undefined shop averaged nine employees, the drapery six, while the fruit and vegetable sellers who were commonly regarded as familial retailers only two. As already discussed, there does not appear to have been a falling away of familial retailing. While large shops were emerging small enterprise in Victoria remained healthy. The emergence of large emporiums and the separation of home and workplace are often seen to coincide. As has been suggested, already, however, the separation of home and workplace was both sector and class specific and prolonged.

132 Bright and Hitchcocks, London Book, 1 August 1878.
133 Census of Victoria, 1891, Occupations of the People, Table VIII.
Some of the development associated with the 'retail revolution' was merely proliferation of small to medium sized business. In particular, food shops were decentralized. In 1888, J. Batram and Sons, a butter and bacon retailer employing only 20 hands, was one of the largest. Mrs Mary Punshon employed 16 hands at the largest of her four shops and had six horses and carts for delivering. Kathleen Fitzpatrick has given an account of the shop delivery system in Melbourne suburbs before 1914: milk and bread delivered every day, butter and eggs twice a week and fruit and vegetables once a week. The butcher and grocer also delivered orders. Hawkers proliferated and increased competition. Moran and Cato grocers, were the first chain store operators in Victoria opening in 1882 and having 50 branches by 1898.

The size of the mid-nineteenth century Victorian offices was extremely small. In 1854, there were four State Savings Banks in Victoria - at Melbourne, Geelong, Portland and Port Fairy - and seven employees. The Melbourne bank premises in Collins Street had a banking chamber 12 by 15 feet. Depositors were only paid on Wednesdays. The banks erected impressive premises in Collins Street from the 1850s and in the 1880s there was a "building mania". Most staff worked in small department or in smaller branch offices, however. There were 2273 banking staff in Victoria in 1889 and 500 bank branches, including head offices, giving an average sized office of four staff. Similarly, the largest mercantile establishments, Sargood, Butler and Nicol, Beath Scheiss and Co., Paterson, Laing and Bruce were only of middling size. Paterson, Laing and Bruce grew from an establishment of 97

134 Sutherland, ed., Victoria, lists 907 thumbnail biographies or a fifth of an estimated 4750 Victorian 'providers-distributors'.
136 Age, 30 March 1904.
employees in 1880 to 180 in 1890 but the size of its counting house staff only rose from 16 to 22.\footnote{Paterson, Laing and Bruce, Salary Books.} Its departmental staff, warehouse retailing assistants, grew from 38 to 84. Goldsbrough, Mort and Company's woolbroking office had a salaried staff of 60 in 1893 divided into five departments.\footnote{Goldsbrough, Mort and Company, Salary Books.}

Most departments within government were not large, either. The Government was the largest single clerical employer and the four largest in 1890 were the secretary's branch and the locomotive branch of the Railway Department with 108 and 49 staff respectively and the money order and the savings bank branch and the accounts branch of the Post Office with 43 and 40 staff respectively.\footnote{Statistical Register. 1890, Blue Book.} Not only were public service departments not enormous but they were not concentrated offices. The Royal Commission questioned public service executives on office accommodation between 1870 to 1872.\footnote{Royal Commission on the Public Service, 1873, pp. xxviii-xxix, clauses 1925-30, 2126-30, 2570-75, 2958-66, 3019-20, 3076-86, 4185-91, 6834-42, 7166-69, and Appendix K.} It was of the opinion that clerical work should be in one large room like a bank chamber to promote supervision and to effect savings in time and economy. The largest clerical office accommodated 12 men. It found that government offices were not designed with a 'view to supervision'. The Lands Department offices were described as a "rabbit warren", while the Public Works' Inspector-General's branch, which was responsible for office accommodation, was a "wretched place" cut up into small rooms. Similarly, the departments in the emporiums of the 1880s were rooms: the costume and mantle room, the underclothing room, the drapery room and so on.

Processes of centralization, bureaucratization and rationalization which led to the development of hierarchies, albeit limited, had begun. While Davison and others are right to note these developments, we need to relate them to the
developing economic and labour market dualism. A bifurcation was developing in the 1880s between a small number of commercial and administrative hierarchies and a large growing number of small concerns. The bureaucratizing concerns offered stable, secure, if not well-paid, employment. They offered better than average conditions of employment. Of course, there was office overtime but this was becoming less. Banks in the 1850s were open from nine to five and as, one bank clerk noted, "for months together in the busy season we were often kept in till 10 o'clock, and it was rare to get away earlier than 7 [o'clock]." It had been the inner city shop assistants and office staff who had won shorter working hours in the 1840s. Small workplaces continued to offer insecure, lower paid and poorer conditions of employment.

The developing trade unionism reflected this dualism. The emergence of white collar trade unionism in the 1880s is usually interpreted in terms of class consciousness of bureaucratized workers trying to conserve their privileges at a time when they were being newly exposed to the same working conditions as labourers. Perhaps the emphasis should be placed, instead, on the division between smaller and larger shops in this regard. For most shop and office workers in small workplaces management impositions were not always unpopular; career structures, hours, working conditions and job security were sought. The balance of protest shifted to those in the small workplaces without the benefits. In the 1880s and 1890s, it was low-paid staff working long hours in smaller workplaces in which there was not a highly developed division of labour who were discontented. The leaders of shop and office discontent worked in small shops and offices which in the former did not have short working hours and in the latter paid pittances to their staff.

142 Australasian Insurance and Banking Record, 19 March 1900, p. 910.
for long hours. The bifurcation of workplace sizes and conditions of employment was resulting in a bifurcation of unionism.

2.4 Conclusion: Women's paid employment only at the margins
The era of the single business girl began in the 1880s. Women only got their feet in the side door of paid employment, however. The development of hierarchies with a groundswell of support from ambitious men was the major concern of older male shop and office workers, not feminization. Before the 1890s depression, women's employment was not considered threatening to men for the educational and social criteria used to compare job applicants meant that only a few educated and 'respectable' women were employed and on a separate basis from men. A small group of middle class women entered government clerical jobs, went behind counters and into counting houses with the opening up of jobs competitively on the basis of an amalgam of age, merit, class and gender. They were employed to do skilled and semi-skilled tasks at relatively good salaries. The young, unmarried, middle-class women entering shop and office work in the 1880s were not entering mundane dead-end jobs. Their employment had some status, security and promise of promotion. The middle class recruitment of women to these occupations in the 1870s and 1880s was to stamp them as desirable, respectable female occupations long after the class recruitment, job content and circumstances changed.

Women were more marginal and less exploited in the 1880s than later, then. This story is at odds with the economic-rational story which states that, in the sexual redivision of labour, men performed the skilled tasks and women were employed at half the male rate to do the unskilled work engendering male workers' antipathy in the process. Women's entry into the occupations does not fit into a monistic degradation of labour argument which seeks to explain all stages of women's employment as dilution of men's positions. Economic
rationality has been explored from the perspective of young unmarried women and their families. I have argued that feminization occurred initially because of pressure from young, middle class women and their families. I have contrasted this argument with some 'economic rational' explanations. I have balanced one economic-rational argument with another.

The repercussions of liberal reform in the late nineteenth century provided the mechanisms, especially educational and extra-workplace training, by which the female, as well as the male, commercial-bureaucratic labour force was changed. Women were active agents of the change.
Hosts of Untrained, Poorly Qualified Youths?

10. Telephone Classes. 1907
The trouble with most girls is that they are not properly trained to make their way in the world. They have very little knowledge of what is wanted, and get little useful help from their men-folk. They don't understand there is absolutely no demand for unskilled, unintelligent labour, while there are unlimited opportunities for intelligent enterprise. They are easily discouraged, for they have not enough belief in their own capacity, and crowd into the miscellaneous occupations that are already hopelessly overcrowded. The resulting competition brings it about that there are educated girls in this city today working, as scullery maids, for a weekly wage that a labourer would turn up his nose at as a day's pay. The first thing to do is to take your labour to a good market. Find out something that is not done at all and wants doing, or if done is done badly and clumsily. Then spare no pains to become a specialist at that, learn to do it as well as it can be done, no matter what sacrifices that entails. It will pay you in the end. Then you can think well of yourself, and compel others to think well of you. It is much better to take a couple of years to qualify to earn a decent income which will increase as time goes on, than to commence at once earning a starvation wage that must diminish as you grow older...We have employed both men and women here, and I can sincerely say that I prefer girls to work with... I have no sympathy with the men who ought to be doing the rough open-air work so much needed in a young country, who complain of the competition of women in sedentary 'lady-like' occupations.

11. Stott and Hoare's Business College. Students in the Foyer. 1907
Only a few weeks ago a very reputable man in the city called upon him and assured him that his son, who had matriculated at the University, was employed in a leading shipping office at 12s. 6d. per week, and was twenty-four years of age. This man said it was scandalous, and wanted to know what the people of this country, and especially the Labour Party, were doing that this sort of thing should happen. He said if he opened his mouth his son would be discharged. The young man's pay was not sufficient to maintain him. That being so, his father was in the unfortunate position of having to keep him. In another instance, a young man who had been educated at the University High School was employed in a leading solicitor's office. He was twenty years of age, and he received 10s. a week. He asked for an increase, and was told that if he learned shorthand they would favourably consider an increase of 2s. 6d. per week. This young man then passed the Public Service examination, and obtained a position in the Lands Department at a salary of £40 a year to begin with. These things were simply scandalous.
VPD. 1906, 115, pp. 3276, E. C. Warde.
12. George and George's Female Shop Staff, 1898

"Five girls were seated at the tables and they looked up from their work as Mr Thomas came in, followed by Helen..."I keep everybody separate as far as I can" he said. "See the men down there, and the girls here. I don't want my time wasted".


13. George and George's Male Shop Staff, 1898

Take, as an example, the manchester department; in all big shops there are no females employed, and the second and third hands in that department would receive a certain salary. In the millinery department, where there are no males, the second and third hands would not receive two-thirds of the same salary... where the low wages are paid, that applies especially to females.

...there was most terribly severe competition at the present time. He wondered how many members of the House had received letters from men who were forty or fifty years of age, and who had held positions in which they were receiving an income from £4 to £5 a week, but who had been driven out of their offices to be replaced, perhaps by a chit of a girl or boy at 25s. a week. And perhaps the boy or girl did the work better than those men who were driven out, owing to the training which young people now received. Still, his heart went out to those unfortunate clerks, who were so displaced.1

3.1 Growing "Hosts" of Youths 1890-1907: Heroic and Anti-heroic Interpretations

The praise and criticism levelled at the feminization of shops and offices continued after 1890. Opponents of women's employment seemed unable to dam the flow. The number of women in commerce doubled between 1891 and 1911. Most of the increase occurred, moreover, in the 1890s, a period of economic depression. Officially, women enumerated in commerce rose from 7724, in 1891, to 14415, in 1901, to 17163, in 1911; an increase of 86% between 1891 and 1901 and 19.1% between 1901 and 1911, compared to 7.1% and 15.2% for males, respectively. While the proportion of women grew from approximately one-tenth to one-fifth of employees in commerce in the 1890s, commerce as a proportion of all breadwinners only increased from 13.8% to 15.9% between 1891 and 1911.2

There have been two approaches to the feminization trend which could be described as the heroic and anti-heroic interpretations. At issue is whether a paid labour paradise was won or lost for women in these years. The early feminist reformers addressed themselves to the problem of opening up respectable employment avenues for women. Women were restricted to a narrow band of occupations, particularly domestic service and

1 Victorian Parliamentary Debates (VPD), 1906, 105, p. 3281, Donald MacKinnon.
2 Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1911, Occupations of the People, Table 4.
manufacturing; that is, they were horizontally segregated in the workforce by occupation. The reformers sought opportunities for women in the expansion of lower white collar employment and were optimistic about the long-term prospects of women in this area.3

Some recent feminist historians, however, have argued that women's paid labour position deteriorated at the turn of the century.4 Women, it is claimed, were partly responsible for this deteriorating labour market position owing to their separatist policies: rather than arguing for equality, they asked for special provisions for women in relation to men.5 The revisionist argument stresses that few women were reached the higher echelons of the retail and clerical wage structure; that is, they were vertically segregated within occupations at the bottom of labour hierarchies. Women were confined to a lower paid, secondary labour market position. Revisionists question why the women's movement, which won suffrage, did not also win wage labour equality or, at least, a better deal. Their differing interpretations reflect the differing strategic priorities of the earlier and later feminist movements.

These two aspects of segregation, horizontal and vertical, are the subject of this chapter. Rather than arguing whether a labour market paradise was won or lost, I will be returning to my theme that changes within the sexes have been overlooked by a concentration upon the rising feminization ratio.


Neither female reformers nor male politicians manipulated segregation as they may have wished. While shop and office work was feminizing, the occupations were still male-dominated. While primary and secondary labour markets were developing, women were not the only ones in the secondary labour market with "low wages, unfair conditions, long hours and tendencies to generally lower the workers' life and standard of living".\textsuperscript{6} Moreover, the men who won the privileged positions in the developing hierarchies had different attributes from the men in shops and offices in the 1880s. The women entering shops and offices were younger than the women in the 1880s. Vertical and horizontal segregation were redrafted not eliminated or instituted at the turn of the century.

3.2 State Regulation of Women Working in Shops and Offices

Australian governments were relatively large employers of female labour in the nineteenth century; so, too, were British and American governments. The State was the major employer of lower white collar women in Victoria in the 1880s. There were 403 female officers, for instance, in the Post and Telegraph Department by 1891. They comprised 13.5\% of the Department and a sizable proportion of the 7724 women officially enumerated in commerce.\textsuperscript{7}

Women's conditions in state employment deteriorated from the 1880s. In 1883, women were given the lowest classification in the Victorian Public Service clerical classification. Women could not be promoted beyond the 5th grade. Their opportunities were further reduced in 1890 when the avenue of promotion to postmistressing was curtailed. Sir Henry Cuthbert, the Victorian Postmaster-General, ruled that while no existing salaries would be reduced,

\textsuperscript{6} Anti-Sweating League (ASL) Minute Book, 4 September and 7 August 1905, Australian National Library.
\textsuperscript{7} Post Office and Telegraph Department Report, 1891, p. xix, Victorian Parliamentary Papers (VPP), 1892-3, 2.
in future no women would be appointed to manage a post office which entailed a salary of more than £100 per annum. The one regulatory gain, the 1901 federal equal pay provision, after the Post Office became a Commonwealth responsibility, was never implemented. The changing segregatory policy of the Post Office Department meant that fewer female telegraph operators were given permanent employment, no new postmistresses were appointed and the postmistresses who held that position at Federation gradually resigned or retired.\(^8\)

Women in the Post Office and other government departments were restricted to typing and telephony from the turn of the century. The number of women in the Commonwealth clerical division, about a third of whom were employed in Victoria, dropped from 341 to 226 between 1905 and 1918 while the number of typists and telephonists rose from 661 to 2419.\(^9\) Indeed, women's segregation in the Victorian and the Australian public service is said to have been more emphatic than in the English and American public services.\(^10\)

Historians, internationally, have considered women's experience in state employment to be representative of commercial employment, generally.\(^11\) Australian historians, in particular, have held public service employment to be a microcosm of a wider curtailment of female employment conditions. Australian governments were able to use their new wide-ranging legislative powers to discriminate against all women in paid labour.\(^12\) In the nineteenth century, protective labour legislation, or legislation designed to improve

---

\(^8\) Claire McCuskey, 'Women in the Victorian Post Office', in Bevege, James, and Shute, eds., *Worth Her Salt*, p. 61.

\(^9\) 26% of the 15,120 permanent employees and 31% of the 12,238 exempted and temporary Commonwealth public service officers were Victorian and a large proportion of the 658 permanent and 587 temporary central staff were also Victorian in 1911. *Eighth Report of the Commonwealth Public Service by the Commissioner*, 1913, pp. 31-45, *Australian Parliamentary Papers (APP)*, 1913, 3.


workers' employment, restricted the hours and types of work women could be employed in. Men were not restricted similarly. Moreover, men were paid more than women. Segregation and gender-differentiated pay were institutionalized in arbitration legislation. From the turn of the century, governments used protective labour legislation and arbitration, then, to deprive women of equality in the workplace.\textsuperscript{13}

Working women's experience in Victoria, again, seems to support such a case. The 1896 Factories Act gave the Victorian wages boards the power to take the sex of the worker into consideration, effectively to pay women less than men for doing the same work. At the connivance of trade unions and employers, women could be excluded from work. The Act was instituted despite opposition from the Victorian Women's Political Association. The deterioration of women's working conditions is said to have culminated in 1907 with the national Harvester Judgement by Justice Higgins in the Commonwealth Arbitration Court. This decision defined the basic wage as one that was sufficient for a man to maintain a reasonable standard of living for himself, his wife who was not in paid employment and their three children. The Harvester decision is said to have rationalized women's unequal pay and prospects for the next half century.

The Victorian example broadly fits Desley Deacon's anti-heroic thesis. She argues that an earlier period of relative equality for women in public service employment was lost during the extension of state regulation at the end of the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{14} Increasingly, women were to be found at the bottom of labour hierarchies. She relates this development to a change in government direction. A new middle class of intellectual public servants gained the ascendancy of power in political decision-making in the 1890s. These men


\textsuperscript{14} Deacon, 'Naturalization of Dependence', pp. 107-213.
instituted a dual public service labour market by excluding women from male jobs which had high status and were well paid. They argued that women were unsuitable for responsible positions and it was harmful for them to take such positions. In New South Wales, the 1895 Public Service Act excluding married women from the public service and the institution of the Public Service Board in 1896 were engineered by prominent public servants. Timothy Coghlan, the Government Statistician, also manipulated state statistics to downgrade the role of married women in the economy. The public service clique, nevertheless, promoted single women's employment in designated positions on the basis of equal pay. Even single women were disadvantaged after 1900, however, when the new middle class began to lose its ascendancy. In turn, the now powerful and centralized state machinery was dominated by urban labour and anti-labour who manipulated it to rob single women of their limited equality in the workplace. Thus, according to Deacon, women lost employment equality at the end of the nineteenth century.

The State's direct role in the labour market in Victoria, however, was more restricted than Deacon's account suggests. The government sector must be located in the overall labour market structure. The effect of government regulation on general, private sector segregation patterns needs to be examined.

**Government as an Employer?**

The private sector began to rival the public sector as a white collar employer from the 1890s. Between 1881 and 1891, the Victorian public service increased by one-third, although the public service clerical division increased by only 15%. The clerical component of state employment then

---

15 Public Service Board Report, 1891-1901, and Public Service Commissioner's Report, 1901-1911, VPP.
remained at about one-third between 1891 and 1911. Between 1891 and 1901, public service employment dropped by 15%, falling to 1897 and rising to 1901. In 1901, the largest state departments, the Post and Telegraph, Trade and Customs and Defence, became Commonwealth responsibilities. There were 9489 permanent and temporary, Victorian employees of these departments in 1912, double the number at Federation. The number of permanent and temporary state public service employees also doubled from 3116 to 6818, only slightly above the 1891 level of state employment. From 1911 to 1921 state employment remained static. By contrast, private sector employment grew continuously. Moreover, large private sector and quasi-government employers emerged after 1890 to equal the size of public service offices.

The Secretary's Branch of the Railways, for example, doubled between 1881 and 1891 from 58 staff to 108 staff but only grew to 111 by 1901. The Lands Department's 15-section Administrative Branch grew from 193 in 1890 to 211 in 1901 to 237 by 1911. The Melbourne Metropolitan Board of Works, however, which was only established in the 1880s grew steadily; it had a clerical staff of 42 in 1891, 93 in 1901 and 167 by 1911. The State Bank of Victoria grew from about 130 to 200 staff between 1881 and 1891 and more than doubled from 247 to 537 between 1901 and 1914.

In the decades after the turn of the century, more significantly, the State was no longer the trendsetter among employers whose workforces were feminizing. From the 1890s, feminization in the private sector gathered pace.
Women made up 1% of the commercial clerks in 1881 and 28% by 1911. I estimate, on the basis of later detailed retail assistant's data, that the total number of retail shop employees was approximately 15700 in 1891 to 22000 in 1911: the feminization rate rose from about 10% in 1891 to 27% in 1911.\(^{20}\)

Feminization was unusually advanced in the large stores. By 1911, the 12 largest stores probably averaged 400 staff each, that is, they comprised about one-fifth of Victorian retail staff.\(^{21}\) By 1890, 30% of Ball and Welch's workforce was female, or 46 out of 153 employees.\(^{22}\) By 1898, 46% of George and George's workforce was female, or 73 out of 160 employees.\(^{23}\) By 1907, 54% of Robertson and Moffat's workforce was female, or 380 of its 700 Bourke Street shop staff.\(^{24}\) These high feminization rates are not surprising since drapery was the largest department in these stores; drapery shops had traditionally been the largest shops and most women shop assistants had been employed in drapery before 1891.\(^{25}\) The Victorian census indicates that the proportion of women in the drapery sector rose from 18% to 50% between 1891 and 1911.

Feminization was also unusually advanced in some large offices. The number of clerical staff in shops also expanded from the 1890s to make shops

\(^{20}\) Census of Victoria, 1891, Occupations of the People, Table VIII. Census of the Commonwealth, 1911, Occupations of the People, Tables 16 and 17. Chief Inspector of Factories and Shops Report (CIFR), 1915, VPP, 1916, 2.  
\(^{21}\) A useful source was the submission by employers to the Commercial Clerks Wages Board 1914, Public Records Office (PRO), 5466/42. Some of these were chain stores such as Moran and Cato with 500 employees.  
\(^{22}\) Ball and Welch Wages Books, for the month ending 7 February 1890, University of Melbourne Archives (UOMA).  
\(^{24}\) Punch Jubilee Number, 27 August 1907, p. 52.  
\(^{25}\) About 50% of the Mutual Store's takings were listed as drapery by 1911. In April 1911, for instance: drapery, 51%; furnishings, 4%; ironmongery, 8%; china, 3%; wines and spirits, 11%; tobacco, 1%; grocery, 13%; shoes, 8%; suits, 3%. In April 1881 the takings were distributed as follows: drapery, 11%; ironmongery, 6%; crockery, 2%; wines and spirits, 22%; boots and shoes, 11%; tailoring, 1%; general goods, 44%; grain products, 3%. Mutual Store Board of Directors' Minute Book, 4 May 1881, UOMA.
significant employers of female clerical labour; in 1911 Foy and Gibson had 74 clerks and Ball and Welch 60 clerks. Women clerks were employed in two new areas. Large department stores created large central cash rooms. In 1899, Ball and Welch was one of the first Melbourne stores to install a pneumatic tube system which resulted in "having all the cash come through one station" by means of cylinders travelling along tubes from the counters to the cash room. Mail order was the other innovation. Large systems developed as city department stores extended services to country districts. Specialized women insurance officers similarly appeared from the 1890s. The Temperance and General Insurance management went on a female recruiting campaign from 1888 recruiting 81 women, or 74% of those recruited, by 1909: there were 54 women employed in 1909 out of 110 head office and Victorian staff.

Meanwhile, little change occurred in the state feminization rate between 1891 and 1911. There were 540 women in the state public service or 16% in 1911, which was little increase over the 1891 ratio. In contrast to the nineteenth century, the public sector maintained a lower feminization ratio to the private sector in the twentieth century.

As state departments lost their pre-eminence as the largest employers of lower white collar workers, public service executives began to use private sector conditions to legitimize some changes in public sector conditions. Public servants lost some of the privileged conditions of employment that they had enjoyed over their private sector counterparts in the name of efficiency and relativity with the private sector. 'Superior staff', for instance, were made

26 Ball and Welch, Outward Letter Book, 28 August 1908, manager referring to 1899 installation.
27 Temperance and General Insurance, Head Office and Victorian Staff, 1888-1909, National Mutual Archives.
to start work at 9 a.m. and to curb long lunch breaks. Their leisurely hours were now considered bad commercial practice and bad examples for the rank and file.29

The change in the State's policy on women's employment and conditions also became more compatible with private sector practice. Women's eligibility to sit open clerical examinations is an example. Girls were eligible to sit open public service examinations in the 1880s and 1890s. The policy on girls competing equally with boys changed from the turn of the century. In 1899, 860 boys sat the clerical examination. 511 girls and 372 boys sat the non-clerical exam with Margaret Lavery getting the highest marks. From the turn of the century, separate exams were held for females. Girls were only offered general division positions as telephone switchboard operators and typists. By contrast, the Australian Mutual Provident Society's policy was consistent. It offered three grades of exams for prospective employees and existing officers from 1877. These involved mathematical questions, logarithms, algebra, probability and practical insurance problems.30 Girls were never eligible to sit for these exams.

Thus, the State was conspicuous in its willingness to employ women in the nineteenth century and the private sector showed little interest in doing so in the 1870s and 1880s. From the turn of the century, however, the private sector's rate of feminization was above that of the State. Moreover, the private sector had an impact on the employment for women public servants. Even so, given the relative decline of women in the public service and the previous conditions governing their employment, it can hardly be argued that women as a whole lost an employment paradise.

29 Public Service Board Report, 1892, pp. 3-4, VPP, 1892-3, 5.
30 Office examination papers 1887-1900, Australian Mutual Provident Society Archives, GM/7/19.
Government as legislator? Protective Labour Legislation

If the State was becoming less significant as a direct employer of female white collar labour, was it becoming more important as a legislator regulating white collar employment generally? Did labour legislation become more discriminatory towards women at the turn of the century? It is clear that protective labour ideology, particularly views supporting limiting women's hours and improving their conditions, was pervasive amongst the Victorian bureaucracy and the women's movement at the turn of the century. Early feminist reformers and their allies applauded the expansion of women's employment in occupations covered by protective labour legislation. The provisions of the first Factory Act in Victoria in 1873 were directed at women and children. The Act stipulated that no women or anyone under 16 could work in a factory for more than 48 hours a week. In 1885, an inspectorate was established to police the legislation. The Chief Inspector of Factories and Shops continually called on the government to extend its legislation. In his first report, the Chief Inspector stated that protective labour legislation was an unmitigated boon for labour, enabling women and children to

find occupations and earn a decent livelihood without impairing health, and in the case of women gives them time to attend to any necessary domestic duty.31

Feminist organizations, such as the National Council of Women, campaigned for the regulation of all women's employment to make it compatible with child-bearing and rearing.32 One of its most prominent members, Margaret Cuthbertson, was female Inspector of Factories and Shops from 1894 to 1920. She publicly defended the need for special employment arrangements for potential wives and women whose primary duties were domestic.33

31 CIFR, 1886, p. 4. VPP, 1887, 3.
32 Weekly Times, 26 June 1909 and 9 July 1910.
33 Cuthbertson often spoke on the value of the Factories Acts to women; see, for example, Woman's Voter, 23 June 1914.
The 'protective legislation' strategy was first challenged by women from the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. A number of feminists began to wonder if they were not creating a "gilded cage" for women of healthier, but highly restricted and underpaid, employment. They believed that all occupations should be opened up to women on the basis of equal pay. In seeking protective labour legislation, however, they had argued that certain jobs should be done by women in conditions compatible with their role within the family. Women's special conditions and delicacy were arguments used to counter claims for equal opportunity and equal pay. The women's movement split over the issue of whether to continue the protective legislation strategy or to support collective bargaining on the same terms as men. The long drawn-out debate was international.

Up to 1907, at least, Victorian feminist organizations were united in supporting protective labour legislation. There are problems, however, in trying to emphasize the significance of protective labour legislation. First, the respectability of women's shop and office work thwarted those politicians, bureaucrats and reformers who wanted wide-ranging protective legislation instituted for commercial women. There were simply not many people advocating legislation for white collar women. The reform movement in Victoria by the 1890s was demanding that all workers' hours should be restricted and wages and working conditions should be regulated. Politicians, however, were reluctant to regulate commerce at all. Secondly, then, there was the lack of formal labour regulations applying to the commercial sector in Victoria.

34 Australian Star, 5 April 1910.
35 For discussion on the incompatibility of the two arguments, see Kelly, 'The Woman Question', pp. 199 and 236.
37 For discussion on the 'forces for reform', see Katherine Sutton, 'Victorian Factory Legislation for Women 1873-1895', unpublished BA (Hons) thesis, University of Melbourne, 1979, pp. 25-34.
There were attempts made to formalize women's segregation in commerce or to have them treated specially. For ten years, there was legislation restricting the hours of women and children in shops. The shops legislation, however, was not designed to change the position of women in shops radically. The first hours provisions for shop assistants in the 1885 Act did not apply specifically to women and applied to few shops. A group of food, chemist and book shops were exempt completely.38 A 'let-out' clause allowed shopkeepers to avail themselves of a local option: a majority of shopkeepers in a trade in a locality simply applied to their local government by petition to have a by-law providing for longer hours. Most shops were in the suburbs and, as the Chief Inspector lamented, "made use of [the concession] to a very great extent".39 Finally, shops which did not avail themselves of the local exemption, that is the larger shops, had invariably introduced short hours voluntarily beforehand. In the early 1870s after meeting a deputation of a few employees, Buckley and Nunn and Robertson and Moffat instituted seven o'clock closing.40 After the 1885 Act, which stipulated seven o'clock closing, Foy and Gibson's management decided to close at six o'clock. Their staff started earlier, at a quarter to nine in the morning, had half an hour for lunch instead of one hour and, to expedite their lunch, the firm provided it on the premises.41 The 1890 Act, restricting the employment of women and boys under 16 to 52 or 60 hours, depending on the type of the shop, did not signal a change, either. There was provision for each employee to work unpaid overtime on 40 days a year. Moreover, as the Chief Inspector noted, "in very many shops the hours of work did not, even before the passing of the

38 These 'Fourth Schedule' shops were: chemist shops, coffee-houses, confectioners, eating-houses, fish and oyster shops, fruit and vegetable shops, restaurants, tobacconists shops, booksellers and newsagents.
39 CIFR, 1886, p. 8.
41 ibid., clause 2487, William Gibson, Foy and Gibson partner.
Act, reach 52". At his prompting, the provisions were extended to metropolitan shopmen in 1900. Protective labour legislation for women in shops legislation was, then, largely nominal.

The factories inspectorate grew more silent on protective labour legislation for women at the turn of the century. An 1896 amendment placed the enforcement of shop regulations into their hands. For the first time, inspectors began to pay attention to the hours worked by female employees in shops. The Chief Inspector was shocked by the extent "of the white slavery which exist[ed] in some of the shops in the large centres of populations in the colony",

The employes in some shops worked up to 90 hours per week including Sundays. I have seldom seen or read of anything more pathetic than the way in which some of the girls employed in these shops approached the Department with the view of obtaining some redress. It was always "Don't let my name get known. I shall be at once dismissed, but I can't stand the hours, and they will reduce them if you will send and let them know the law". It was very seldom that any ill will was shown towards the employer, yet in some cases the girls worked the hours named for from 6s. to 9s. per week, less than 1d. an hour, in some cases, excluding meal time.

Margaret Cuthbertson paid "a good deal of attention" to the hours worked by girls in shops. She made a call for wide-reaching shops legislation for both men and women. The 1900 Act- which restricted the hours of all ordinary metropolitan shop assistants to 52 hours and 4th schedule shop assistants, such as restaurant staff, to 60 hours-ended reforms. There were no more calls to improve female shop assistants conditions. The dominance of radical liberalism waned from the turn of the century as Deacon suggests.

42 CIFR. 1896, p. 11, VPP. 1897, 2.
43 ibid. See also: ASL Minute Book, 7 August 1905, 12 March 1906; Argus, 13 August 1906; VPD, 1906, 115, pp. 3284-5, H. E. Beard.
45 CIFR. 1901, pp. 48-49, VPP. 1902, 2; 1902, p. 42, VPP. 1903, 2; 1903, p. 30, VPP. 1904, 2; 1904, pp. 40-42, VPP. 1905, 3.
Most significantly, reformers had also to face the limits of their own reform movement which had not changed significantly. Anti-sweating organizations and trade union bodies neglected many trades and neglected women but they particularly neglected women in white collar occupations. The Victorian Anti-Sweating League, for instance, had an active Ladies' Committee made up of women prominent in the suffrage movement, such as Miss Lillian Locke and Mrs Isabella Goldstein, and those with links with Dr. Charles Strong's non-conformist Scots Church, such as Mrs Louisia Bevan, Mrs Powell, and Dr. Mary Stone.47 In 1902, a group of eight women formed a fifth of the elected Anti-Sweating League's Council.48 These women sought legislative reforms in women's occupations: an improvement of the terms of nurses' employment in the hospitals; a half-day holiday for domestic servants; a wages board for outdoor clothing workers; the regulation of pupil teachers in private and state schools and women in shops and offices.49 The social origins of women in commerce, however, meant that they were low on the priority list even for these women. Reformers did not advocate special provisions for white collar women in the same way as they had for blue collar women. While supporting a wages board for commercial women, Lillian Locke complained to the 1902 annual conference that

a good many girls went into the trade for pocket or pin money...Until they got these girls to see the ethical wrong they were doing there would be little improvement...50

Shop and office workers were regarded as comprising an inordinate number of women working for pocket or pin money; they were considered to come from middle class backgrounds.51 The traditional sanctions against middle class women not being employed because they did not need employment

47 ASL Minute Book, 12 August 1901. See Betty Searle, Silk and Calico: Class, Gender and the Vote, Sydney, 1988, chapters on Lillian Locke and Vida Goldstein, pp. 39-58 and 59-76.
48 Age, 18 December 1902.
49 ASL Minute Book, 7 August 1896, 7 September 1896 and 22 February 1897.
50 ibid., 3 February 1902.
51 For comment on the socio-economic background of shop assistants, see Jessie Ackerman, Australia From a Woman's Point of View, Melbourne, 1981, first published 1913, p. 203.
continued. They were seen as taking jobs from working class girls who needed to work.

For traditional reasons, similarly, politicians would not agree to wide-ranging legislation for respectable women in paid labour. Alfred Deakin and William Trenwith lamblasted the Victorian Legislative Council for killing the registration of outworkers proposal in the 1896 Factories Bill. Members objected to the proposed legislation on the grounds that it might subject widows and respectable, but indigent, women to public scrutiny and factory-like surveillance. For the same reason, the Council refused to deal with the hours of nurses or to make every shop a factory for the purposes of the factories provisions.52

Rather than legislation especially for women, reformers supported the Anti-Sweating Leagues' attempt to extend the 1896 factories, or wages board legislation, to include all occupations and all workers. The League was led by men like Samuel Mauger, a small hat maker and retailer, who was both founder and secretary from 1895 to 1912. They wanted higher wages for women and better conditions for Victoria's future mothers but they never intended that women gain equal opportunity and pay.53 They were concerned that poor pay for males and increased female employment should not lead to a breakdown in the family.

Feminists led by Vida Goldstein, for different reasons, also supported the Factories Act for all workers. Feminists were not successful in organizing young, commercial women. The Political and Social Crusade attempted to organize women workers through its member's contributions in the Tocsin's

53 See, for example, Rev. Dr. Strong's comments on the social reform movement's aims, Age, 8 November 1906. Royal Commission on Shops, 1903, Evidence, clause 4788, Samuel Mauger.
women's column from 1898. A Women's Clerks' and Typists' Association and a Women's Shop Assistants' Society formed in 1903 were slightly longer-lived. The *Age* newspaper attempted to encourage commercial women's organizations in 1904. Goldstein, however, advocated the establishment of a central association of male and female clerks. The equal pay provision for women in the federal public service had been won only after a hard battle. Goldstein had been supported by a strong female union; in 1901, almost 60% of postmistresses and postal assistants had been employed for more than 15 years and most belonged to their union. Women in commerce were now younger;

the increasing employment of women as clerks and typists was having a lowering effect on wages. That was because women only regarded themselves as casual labour and merely worked in offices until the offer of marriage came along.  

She decided that the more successful strategy would be to secure wages boards for the occupations and, then, to amend the legislation to provide for equal opportunity and pay for women. Her aim was to promote state intervention.

Parliament, whether Liberal or Conservative dominated, was reluctant to intervene in the labour market, however, if intervention threatened to alienate commercial employers or to pre-empt common practice. Both wages board and early closing issues illustrate this. An amendment to include clerks in the Factories Act in 1899 was prompted by the Anti-Sweating League's evidence of clerks working long hours for little pay. The Government replied that it had received no complaints from clerks themselves. The Government ignored

---

55 *Age*, 27 January 1904.  
57 *Age*, 22 March 1904.  
58 *VPD*, 1899, 92, pp. 2633-36, Alexander Peacock, Chief Secretary, responding to W. A. Watt's motion; C. C. Salmond and Alfred Deakin also spoke to the motion.
a recommendation in the 1903 Royal Commission's report that commercial employment should be regulated on the basis that a "large body of clerks" had petitioned Parliament not to interfere in their position. Similarly, Parliament did not bring shop assistants under the Factories Act in 1906 on the basis of petitions from employers and workers not to disturb the "fair and equitable" terms of commercial employment. The wages board legislation was designed to be "beneficial" to employers and workers and to cause the "minimum of inconvenience to the fair employer". Cautious politicians did not grant shop and office workers' wage boards until 1907 and 1911, respectively. By that time, leading employers and the majority of workers had indicated through the factories' inspectorate that they wanted wages boards. Parliament acted cautiously over early closing, too. The 1903 Royal Commission heard evidence that 512, or 31% of shops, closed at 6 pm, 558, or 34%, closed at 7 pm and only 566, or 35%, closed after 7 pm. The majority of shop owners instituted earlier closing, voluntarily, before legislation was enacted for uniform seven o'clock closing in 1906, then. Similarly, a uniform Saturday half-holiday was not legalized until 1909, by which time it was the general practice. The large shops had instituted the 'Saturday half closing' in the 1880s. The legislation up to 1907 that applied to shop assistants, then, was descriptive rather than prescriptive; it only stated the common practice.

By the time the State regulated commercial labour, segregation by gender and unequal wages were well-entrenched. The Anti-Sweating League found that the women were already earning low wages and were segregated in shops and offices when it surveyed conditions in 1906. It was common practice, for example, in city shops' for female employees to work 48 hours a

59 CIFR. 1900, p. 6, VPP. 1901, 2.
60 CIFR. 1906, pp. 49-51, VPP. 1907, 2. There were few complaints from shopkeepers over the 1906 Shops and Factories Act which made a compulsory half closing day and a uniform 6 o'clock closing for most shops.
week while males worked 52 hours.\textsuperscript{61} The Victoria Clerks' Union gathered data from employers on 4512 Melbourne clerks in 1911. The average wage was 30s.7d. or almost £80 per annum. The average male weekly wage was 32s.3d. or, for those over 21, 41s.6d. or about £120 per annum, while the average female weekly wage was 19s.11d. or about £52 per annum.\textsuperscript{62} The Chief Inspector surveying principal employers of non-classified occupations (that is, occupations not provided with a wages board) from 1904 found that even where men and women were doing the same work under the same conditions they were paid on the basis of sex: adult male shorthand clerks' and typists' salaries ranged from £104 to £130 while adult female shorthand typists' salaries ranged from £65 to £104.\textsuperscript{63}

The role of state bureaucrats and reformers in the formation of a dual labour market in shops and offices is overstated by those arguing that a female employment paradise was lost. First, commercial labour was characterized by lack of regulation rather than regulation before 1907. Protective labour legislation only significantly affected public servants and factories. Most of women's shop and office employment in the private sector was unregulated up to 1907. Most women were employed in the private sector. Secondly, women's employment in the Victorian public service was not typical of women's employment in shops and offices in Victoria. There were more general, informal, social forces pushing towards an unequal position for women than state decree.

The major problem with the paradise lost thesis, however, is that women's employment changed in more significant ways than the married-single

\textsuperscript{61} ibid., p. 30.
\textsuperscript{62} Victorian Clerks' Union application to the CIF, 2 July 1911 and 2 October 1911, PRO 5466/41. \textit{Age}, and \textit{Argus}, 4 October 1911.
\textsuperscript{63} Victorian \textit{Year Book (VYB)}: 1904, p. 585; 1905, p. 578; 1906-7, p. 64; 1908-09, p. 712.
dichotomy that Deacon concentrated upon. It is misleading to compare a few widowed, or older women in state employment before 1890 with the influx of young single women after 1890. After 1890 young, urban women started to flock in their droves to shop and office work.

3.3 Oversupply of Untrained Girls?
Early feminist reformers, such as Margaret Cuthbertson, attributed women's expanded manufacturing participation between 1886 and 1905 and feminization of shop and office work to the segregated nature of women's employment. According to Cuthbertson, women's numbers increased in specific occupations because particular trades normally employing women had "developed so largely, and women [were] not employed to displace men, but because they [were] peculiarly fitted for the work". Her own profession seemed to be a good example of this assessment. In 1894, Cuthbertson was the fifth factory inspector to be appointed. At the time she was the only woman in the inspectorate. By 1909, there were 20 inspectors including four women who concentrated on women's employment. Cuthbertson had risen from one white collar women's job to another; from the ranks of female telephonists in the Postmaster-General's Department to the Chief Inspector of Factories' office. She was the "first woman to achieve a substantial post" in the Victorian public service.

The early feminist reformers deplored the formal and informal barriers to women rising up career hierarchies. They attributed the growth of a large secondary labour market of shop and office workers, however, partly to the "problem of women's efficiency". Women in Victoria had to train themselves to move out of the limited manufacturing and domestic employment sectors into responsible positions in the expanding white collar occupations. Women,

---

64 CIFR. 1906, pp. 52-53, VPP. 1907, 2.
such as Helen Davis, a Melbourne University graduate, and Jessie Ackerman, a suffragist and Woman's Christian Temperance Union campaigner, were critical of the calibre of shop and office women after 1900. Davis publicly proclaimed that most women working in commerce and bureaucracy were unbusinesslike:

> When hearing of the low salaries paid girls and women in offices, one interested enough to enquire will often find the fault lies, not more with the employers than with the employed.\(^66\)

The failure to win some white collar jobs and to reach high levels in others was due to the "womanliness" of the women employees. Women were poorly-trained and they chose to start employment at a later age than young men.\(^67\)

Jessie Ackerman chastised business girls and women for being unreliable. She used public service sick leave statistics to illustrate her point. The Public Service Commissioner published results of an enquiry into sick leave in six states by the Commonwealth Postmaster-General's Office between 1905 and 1910. The Public Service Commissioner's 1907 report stated that in 1905 to 1906 women averaged 11.9 days sick leave while men averaged only 5.9 days. Specifically, 43% of clerical women took sick leave for an average of 12.5 days compared to 29% of clerical men who took 5.9 days. 28% of postmistresses averaged 44 days sick leave compared to 17% of postmasters for 32 days. 46% of women telephonists took on average 28 days sick leave as compared to 28% of men who took 17 days, although, as it was pointed out, women were excused night work. In Victoria 39% of telephonists worked only 40 weeks a year. In 1910, the Commissioner complained that the "excessive sick leave" for female telephonists had increased.\(^68\)

---

67 ibid., 6 November 1905, pp. 450-52.
feminist reformers found this sort of data difficult to reconcile with their claim for the same pay and opportunities as men. They continually called on women to become more efficient. Women's efficiency was the theme of an employment directory for women written by Cuthbertson and Henrietta McGowan, a cookery book author, in 1911:

Efficiency alone can ensure due consideration and proper pay, and efficiency never yet came for whistling. Let women face the problem honestly. If work they must, let them equip themselves cheerfully for whatever work they consider themselves best suited for.

The early feminists were not alone. Feminization entered the public consciousness as young, inexperienced 'chits' displacing experienced men. Most of the public comment from 1890 referred to the lowered calibre, wage and age of women recruits to shops and offices. The experience of the depression was said to have exposed the fragility of womanfolk's financial security and every year "a large number of middle circumstanced people and working people" were preparing their daughters along with their sons to earn their own living. Girls of "humble birth" and "average intelligence" were to be found in shops and offices. There was an oversupply of young, "untrained mediocre" female clerks and shop assistants. In the two decades after 1890, some shop and office employment in Victoria became more universally obtainable with a wider occupational recruitment. Shop and office work was commonly regarded as eminently feminine and unskilled, or at least 'femininely-skilled'.

69 See also Report on the Question of Equal Pay for Equal Work in the Department of Public Instruction by the Public Service Commissioner, Victoria 1914, 'Sickness Experience', pp. 12 and 20, VPP, 1914, 2.
70 Henrietta C. McGowan and Margaret G. Cuthbertson, Woman's Work, Melbourne, 1913, p. 8.
71 VPD, 1907,117, p. 2292, E. C. Warde.
72 Tocsin, 7 July 1898.
Young and skilled women?

The significant transformations in female shop and office workers between 1880 and the turn of the century were that women in commerce were younger and that the average female salary dropped. These two trends were more related than contemporaries and historians have allowed. Rather than emphasize the influence of gender on skill and pay, I want to examine the impact of age on the developing dual female labour market.

The census reveals that younger women were invading commerce after the turn of the century. The proportion of males in commerce under 25 was relatively stable in the census years, 33.4% in 1891, 31.9% in 1901 and 30.7% in 1911. By contrast, the female proportion dropped from 37% in 1891 to 33.9% in 1901 but then rose to 43.3% in 1911. The age structure for 15 to 25 year old women in the population was stable in these years at about 20%. While employers reported an oversupply of women seeking commercial employment, manufacturing employers complained of a dearth of juvenile females, despite the attraction of above award rates and, in some cases, free railway fares to travel to the work. The Chief Inspector of Factories attributed this to parents who were sending their children to "business colleges, and to lighter forms of employment". Older women were certainly discouraged from entering shop and office work. Manual dexterity, for example, determined that the "elderly [were] less likely to succeed than the young" in shorthand, typewriting and bookkeeping.

Women in paid commercial employment continued to be concentrated in Melbourne. In 1901 women made up 18.2% of the commercial category and

75 CIFR, 1907, p. 68, VPP, 1908, 1 and 1910, pp. 5 and 12, VPP, 1911, 1.
76 McGowan and Cuthbertson, Woman's Work, pp. 177, 99 and 101.
60% of these women were resident in the Melbourne Board of Works (MBW) area, compared with 47% of all female breadwinners. While 70% of factory women were resident in the MBW area, most of whom were young, there had been no inversion in women's city and country employment in the late nineteenth century as there had been in commerce. Older, country women had not dominated manufacturing, as they had nineteenth century commerce.

It does not follow that the women entering commercial jobs at the turn of the century were unskilled simply because they were younger. Measuring skill is probably the most problematic aspect of feminization. The problem is the lack of detailed job descriptions. In their absence, assessments of skill are often confused with assessments of gender characteristics, respectability and pay. When examining segregated workforces, changes in skill, status and pay must be disentangled from changes in sex and age. The period before 1907 is interesting to examine for there was relatively little technological or work process change and shop and office work was not regulated by arbitration. Yet in this period the pay of women shop and office workers declined. Sex and age were the two important wage-fixing principles in the unregulated shop and office sector. What is often overlooked is that women's wages were differentiated by age and skill as much as by sex.

It is relatively easy to establish the influence of gender on assessments of skill in the first stages of feminization. Clerical job descriptions indicate that 'deskilling' in the second half of the nineteenth century was entangled with feminization. The 1859 Royal Commission and an 1887 return allow us to

77 There are many examples of this confusion. One example, chosen at random, is Susanne Dohrn, who, I think, mixes skill with respectability and pay assessments, 'Pioneers in a dead-end profession: the first women clerks in banks and insurance companies', in Gregory Anderson, ed., The White-Blouse Revolution: Female office workers since 1870, Manchester and New York, 1988, pp. 50-51.
compare some clerical and retail jobs. While the "best talent" was recruited in the 1850s, a male clerk whose sole duty was to sell stamps to the public at the window was paid a salary of £325. A female clerk whose sole duty was to sell stamps to the public at the window only received a salary of £90 in 1887. Male sorters in the Correspondence Branch in 1859 who indexed and filed 152 letters in a year, copied letters, entered minutes and filled in circulars and afforded general assistance received £100. Female clerks in the Accountants' Branch in 1887 who checked fees on telegrams, checked business of country offices, sorted statements received from £54 to £84. A male clerk who sub-divided letters and newspapers for delivery by letter carriers, kept the Town Address Book, and account of letters and newspapers delivered by the letter carriers earned £300 in 1859. Female clerks who recorded addresses, sent out forms concerning letters, delivered letters at windows, acted as counter women in the Registration Branch, received and delivered registered letters, wrote slips and bills received from £54 to £84. Two senior clerks in charge of the Delivery Room received £350 in 1859. A woman in charge of the much larger Delivery Room in 1887 received only £120.

The effect of age on skill assessment and pay is more subtle. Typing is an example in which the question of deskilling must be divorced from the process of feminization and lower commercial wages. Women's wages, such as typists' wages, as politicians correctly informed the Victorian Parliament, had deteriorated from £3 per week (£150 per annum) when the typewriter was introduced in the 1880s to 15 shillings per week (£39 per annum) when the typewriter was introduced in the 1880s to 15 shillings per week (£39 per annum) by 1906.
and 1907.  A male typist, appointed to the Goldsbrough, Mort and Company in October 1892 began with a starting salary of £130 and was earning £180 by 1898. A younger male appointed in 1897 had a starting salary of £104. The first typists appointed to Paterson, Bruce and Laing from 1902 were younger and female and they earned only £78, £52 and £39. Salaries dropped while typing skills did not alter significantly in this period; touch-typing was introduced during the 1900s. Salaries were smaller and the age of workers was younger.

Wage data from Ball and Welch, the large Melbourne department store, shows clearly that average salaries declined between 1890 and 1900, at the same time that the proportion of women increased. The average salary for shop assistants was £111 in 1890, £84 in 1895 and £81 in 1900. The proportion of women rose from 30% in February 1890 to 32% in February 1895 to 36% in February 1900. Table 3-1 reveals that while the proportion of females earning less than £52 rose by 36%, the proportion of males earning less than £52 rose by 7%. While this might indicate, for instance, the influence of women upon a wage structure, these salary changes occurred without any significant changes in skill.

| Table 3-1: Distribution of a Department Store Staff by Salary Groups by %, 1890, 1895 and 1900 (absolute numbers in brackets) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Female | | | Male | | |
| | 1890 | 1895 | 1900 | 1890 | 1895 | 1900 |
| >£157 | 4.4 (2) | 4.3 (2) | 2.6 (2) | 17.4 (19) | 13 (13) | 8.5 (12) |
| £107-156 | 6.7 (3) | 8.7 (4) | 5.1 (4) | 22.9 (25) | 15 (15) | 19.2 (27) |
| £52-105 | 44.4 (20) | 32.6 (15) | 32.1 (25) | 37.6 (41) | 42 (42) | 34 (48) |
| <£52 | 44.4 (20) | 54.3 (25) | 60.3 (47) | 22 (24) | 30 (30) | 37.6 (53) |

79 VPD, 1906, 115, p. 3113, G. M. Prendergast and 1907, 117, p. 2292, E. C. Warde. See also the Chief Inspector of Factories' survey, 1904-1911, CIFR, VPP. This process occurred in other states: for New South Wales, see Desley Deacon, 'The Naturalisation of Dependence'; and for Western Australia, see L. L. Armstrong, 'The Commercial Woman', Australian Highway, 1/3, May 1919, p. 11.
80 Goldsbrough, Mort and Company, ABL, 2A/251A.
Segregation of course limited women's access to the acquisition of some skills. Young males were given a wider experience than girls. Take, for example, hardware sales:

When a boy comes into our place from school, about fourteen or fifteen years old, he goes into the lower part of the office, copying letters, delivering invoices, and going to the post; from there he goes to another part of the office, possibly to assist the ledgerkeeper or the cashier. From there he may be drafted to the cash desk, going through the whole routine of the office, and afterwards he is put into the shop. It may be 3 or 4 years before a boy reaches the hardware department itself- it depends upon the boy's ability.81

Once he became a salesman in a hardware department, the boy was given experience in all branches of sales and stockkeeping.82 By contrast, the inexperienced sixteen year old girl working at a suburban main street fancy goods shop was given store work, at first only being called to serve in the shop when it was busy as on Friday nights. After a year she would graduate to counter work but she served only when all the other girls were serving.83 She was not given the breadth of experience of a male colleague. But we are comparing large department store conditions with suburban conditions. A "position in town" for a woman had better conditions and offered more progression.84

Segregation, within large stores, ensured women had a hierarchy based on skill and pay. Particular merchandise selling or pen work was demarcated "men's" or "women's" work. Occupational sex-stereotyping and designations decided in the workplace were justified on the basis of women's physique. The constant refrain throughout the evidence to the Royal Commission on Shops and Factories in 1902 and 1903 was that male and female shop assistants did not do the same work: female work was different because it

---

81 Royal Commission on Shops, 1903, Evidence, clause 2057, James Henderson, manager, James McEwan, ironmongers.
82 Foy and Gibson Letterbooks, 15 June 1900, UOMA.
84 ibid., p. 80.
was "lighter". John McIntosh, Director of Ball and Welch maintained that there was no difference in males' and females' pay taking into account men's and women's abilities and physical powers. Like other respondents, he could not decide if he were paying for muscle or brains; he mixed them up in a category of 'ability to manage'. He emphasized muscle, however. A woman had to have a man to help her:

In the silk department of the dress department; of course, no woman would probably succeed, the work is too heavy; but in the departments where female labour is employed- like the underclothing or mantle and millinery- the wages are quite as high as the men's.

There were, of course ladies in charge of women's departments such as dressmaking and millinery, like Miss O'Callighan, but even they "did not do the same work as men".

There is a great difference to be drawn between female and male managers for the simple reason that a man could not take the place of a female and a female could not manage a department that a man is managing. Take millinery. We had a male manager there, but he is merely buying; we have a female manager also. In the mantle department, it is entirely managed by females. But a female would not go and take charge of the dress department of the Manchester department- the work would be too heavy; there is a lot of reaching up.

The physical side of office work was still being stressed in the interwar period. Ledgers were heavy. Counter work in banks involved standing up in a responsible position all day which women were said to be not physically suited to. Alan Marshall's autobiography shows the prejudice a qualified

85 Royal Commission on Shops, 1903, Evidence, clauses: 388, Robert Young, North Melbourne draper; 423, Thomas Pritchard, North Melbourne draper; 440-2, Edwin Harcourt, South Melbourne draper; 464, Abraham Crawford, Prahran draper; 691-694, Charles Keig, Williamstown draper; 838-54, Westmore Stephens, department store proprietor; 933-8, John McIntosh, Ball and Welch's managing director; 964-68, George Stirling, Richmond draper; 999, Joseph Levy, city tailor; 1159-63, William Robson, city draper; 1323-25, John Kelleher, Foy and Gibson's manager; 2478-2479 William Gibson, partner in Foy and Gibson.
86 ibid., clause 933, John McIntosh.
87 ibid., clause 938, and clause 886, Charles Davies, Fitzroy draper.
89 Transcript, Judgment and Award for Female Bank Officers, New South Wales, 1928. See, for example: Jessie Bennett's evidence, 6 June 1928, p. 12, ABL, A2/37/6; and William Prior's evidence, 20 June 1928, p. 40, ABL, A2/37/10.
male on crutches faced in getting employment on a 'full male wage' in Melbourne offices in the 1920s and 1930s. The constant refrain from employers interviewing him was that clerical work required a strong healthy male to carry around heavy account books and ledgers. Efficiency and masculinity were closely associated by men and also by women.\textsuperscript{90}

There is a mystique surrounding separate spheres, then. Jobs were demarcated, they involved separate training and they attracted different pay, but sometimes this was in spite of little difference in job content. More generally, women's segregation horizontally, makes comparison difficult but it also disguises the fact that women had age-earning profiles and were differentially skilled, also. Poverty of data has meant that there has been little work on age-earning profiles, let alone transitions in age-earning profiles. Most of the private sector material does not give birthdates of employees. Ann Larson has found that in 1895 the average male Victorian public service clerk earned £150, or the nominal skilled labourers' benchmark, at age 26.\textsuperscript{91}

By 1911, this rate was not reached until age 28 or 29. In 1911, the average public service clerk was 39 to 40 years old and earning £219 per annum. The virtually all-male clerical public service can be compared to the virtually all-female clerical staff of an insurance office. Age-specific records on 80 single women employed by Temperance and General in 1910-11 shows the average age of the women was 20 and the firm had appointed its first 14 year old girl. The average wage was £37. Women rarely reached the £150 salary, Miss K. Puttman and Miss E. Cockes reached in 1912 and 1914 after 17 and 18 years employment respectively. Table 3-3 shows graduations of salaries on the basis of age and presumably skill which dead-end manual jobs did not display once the adult rate had been achieved.

\textsuperscript{90} Alan Marshall, \textit{This is the Grass}, Melbourne, 1962, p. 186, ff.
Table 3-2: Age-Earning Profiles: Public Service and Insurance Clerks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Public Service Clerks</th>
<th></th>
<th>Average salary</th>
<th>Female Insurance Clerks</th>
<th></th>
<th>Average salary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>£</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>£</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19/6/0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>43/10/0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19/6/0</td>
<td>22/12/0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>49/6/0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22/4/0</td>
<td>23/5/0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>59/8/0</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23/5/0</td>
<td>31/2/0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>63/4/0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>31/2/0</td>
<td>31/8/0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31/8/0</td>
<td>37/6/0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>93/6/0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>37/6/0</td>
<td>40/12/0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>109/4/0</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>40/12/0</td>
<td>46/6/0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>122/18/0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>44/8/0</td>
<td>54/12/0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>105/14/0</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>46/6/0</td>
<td>58/12/0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>58/12/0</td>
<td>70/12/0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>112/4/0</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>70/12/0</td>
<td>90/12/0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>90/12/0</td>
<td>130</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>151/2/0</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>130</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>163/3/0</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>163/12/0</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>164/8/0</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>186/12/0</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>170/16/0</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>198/14/0</td>
<td>34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>203/8/0</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>212/18/0</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>231/18/0</td>
<td>38</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>243/18/0</td>
<td>39</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>265/10/0</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>269/10/0</td>
<td>41</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>254/8/0</td>
<td>42</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>269/12/0</td>
<td>43</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>267/14/0</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>282/16/0</td>
<td>45</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>46</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>289/12/0</td>
<td>47</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50+</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>390/16/0</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>950</td>
<td>Average: 219/4/0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Total: 80</td>
<td>Average: 37/4/0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It took women longer but there was some scope for some women to progress. Even in 1913, a "first-class Saleswoman... could always command a good salary, but juniors, or those who had only average ability, [and these were usually coterminous] had often to be content with very little...".93 Age and skill

92 Victoria Government Gazette, 17, 27 January 1912. Temperance and General female staff, HO, Book 1, 23 November 1896 to 16 February 1916- birthdates and salary histories only from 1910-1914.

93 McGowan and Cuthbertson, Woman's Work, p. 177.
determined women's salaries just as they determined males' salaries but with different results.

The dual female labour market can be seen by examining department store data. The Ball and Welch store material, mentioned above, also shows that there were some skilled and long-serving female employees and that shop staff were not simply interchangeable. Women's turnover, overall, was not greater than men's in Ball and Welch from the 1890s. In February 1895, there were 43 men still employed who had been employed in February 1890 or 30% of the 1890 male staff. At the same time there were 18 women still employed or 34% of the 1890 female staff. After ten years, 21 men or 15% of the 1890 male staff were still employed compared to 12 women or 23% of the 1890 female staff. Eight out of the ten highest salaried men and women in 1900 had been employed in 1890. The Ball and Welch outward letter books between 1892 to 1910 were almost entirely made up of references for permanent, temporary and special employees which confirm the wages data in addition to giving a sketch of employees' work histories.\textsuperscript{94} Between March 1903 and March 1907, 140 male shop assistants and clerks leaving the firm averaged 2.7 years employment while 55 women averaged 4.7 years. Indeed, in the twenty year period 1891 to 1911, 209 women averaged 4.3 years employment. The male rate was affected by the echelon of cash boys who were unskilled and had a high turnover.

Ball and Welch references show that even though women were not paid equal wages, some did hold positions of responsibility and were skilled and valued employees. Miss A. Sheehan, head of the lace department, and Miss S. Graham in charge of the underclothing department, both worked 15 years

\textsuperscript{94} Ball and Welch, Outward Letter Book: 16 February 1892 to 3 July 1894; 17 July 1894 to 5 May 1900; 26 February 1903 to 21 February 1908; February 1908 to August 1911. The references outline job content and are written for some temporary staff who worked as little as two weeks and some who were considered unsatisfactory. They give much more information than the wages books.
before leaving to marry. The Ball and Welch manager was not dissembling when he 'regretted to lose' a first class saleswoman and stockkeeper, the capable and conscientious Miss B. O'Callaghan, head of the Underclothing Department, after 30 years' service. Her deputy, Miss G. Causley, left the department at the same time after ten years' service to get married. Even within the 'secondary labour market', there were first class women shop assistants and clerks. There were 22 employees with salaries over £150 in 1898, including four sales women: in 1901 there were 28, including six women. Those in this higher salary bracket were one-fifth of all females at a time when women made up one-third of the staff.

Several managers gave their opinion to the Royal Commission on factories and shops in 1902 that it took five years to train a first-class shopman or woman. Moreover, shop staff were not so interchangeable as might have been thought even within the sexes. For example, in a confidential response to another employer, Ball and Welch said of one of its male employees, that he was employed in our Mercery Dept but being a fancy man was not as conversant with the stocks as we would have wished, but we had every confidence of his integrity, and I think you will find him a good man in his own place that is the Fancy Department.

Some employees "left of their own accord" while others were made redundant owing to "changes in the department". During the depression, women like Miss M. Coffey, a millinery sales assistant for ten years and described as a good stockkeeper and saleswoman who had "a thorough knowledge of the business", and men like Mr Walter Barkly, a "thoroughly competent clerk"

95 ibid., 13 July 1911 and 14 January 1909.
96 ibid., 27 July 1910, 9 September 1910.
98 ibid., Ball and Welch to Mr Cross, 12 January 1893.
who had spent ten years in the counting house, were made redundant owing to "necessary changes in staff". They were not put onto other duties.

Private sector commercial employment data before 1907 reveals that the role of the State in dual labour market formation was not only overstated but misconstrued. The State is said to have restricted women's hours, pay and conditions by legislation, and rendered women unable to compete with men for the highly-skilled and highly-paid jobs. Informal segregation had already accomplished some of these conditions. The Ball and Welch material shows, moreover, that there was a group of women who were skilled and relatively well paid which is problematic if the female labour market is defined only as unskilled, poorly-paid and rapidly turning-over employment. A single dual labour market also suggests that while women occupy the secondary labour market, men occupy the primary labour market. Were men displaced from the secondary labour market by women, however? How did they secure primary labour conditions?

3.4 Displacement of males?

There were five times the number of young men under 25 as there were young women in commerce at the turn of the century. The number of young men continued to rise. There were 6000 female wage and salary earners in commerce in 1901 compared to 38000 male, that is, about 1700 female and 1300 male positions above the 1891 census figures. While a further 5000 female wage and salary positions were created between 1901

---

99 ibid., 17 June 1893 and 20 July 1895. Miss Coffey may well have then got a job at George Stirling's Richmond drapery and, together with Miss Dickson, she may be responsible for establishing the shop's reputation amongst society women. It was a coup for Sidney Myer to recruit both women in 1912. The Melbourne society women followed them and patronized Myer thereafter. Alan Marshall, *The Gay Provider: The Myer Story*, Melbourne, 1961, p. 66.

100 *Census of Victoria, 1901, Occupations of the People, Table 3*: 20610 males compared to 4888 females in 1901.
and 1911, 11500 male wage and salary positions were created. The feminization rate can be misleading, then. The increasing number and proportion of women employed did not also mean that the number of men decreased. Male labour simply failed to increase at the same rate as female labour. A well-documented example of this is the numbers of accountants and clerks employed in Victorian factories. The overall feminization rate increased from zero, in the 1880s, to 21%, by 1911. Women increased nearly 600%, from 112 to 740, between in 1898 and 1911. At the same time, the number of male clerks and accountants increased a modest 67% from 1665 to 2784. Early feminists like Cuthbertson had suggested this was the case and, similarly, Muriel Heagney was to caution against the displacement thesis in her book, *Are Women Taking Men's Jobs?* in 1935.

The corollary of this which is not drawn out in the feminization literature is that women did not monopolize the secondary labour market position. There were men who continued to occupy a secondary labour market position. Feminization did not result in an improvement in wages and conditions for all young men. It has been established in Chapter 2 that a secondary labour market of young, poorly-paid males existed in the 1870s and 1880s. Men did not vacate the secondary labour market for women. Rather, the number of young men who wanted to be clerks surprised commentators. It was surprising because the remuneration was "scanty", they were required to keep up a "respectable appearance" on their pittance and they had to work

---

101 *ibid.*, 1891 and 1901 and Census of the Commonwealth, 1911. Women numbered as follows: about 4111 in 1891; 5824 in 1901; and 10807 in 1911. Men numbered as follows: about 36326 in 1891; 37584 in 1901; and 49055 in 1911.

102 *VYPs*, 1898-1912, Classification of Hands Employed—under the heading 'Production'. There is no data earlier than 1898 and after 1912 it is not disaggregated by sex.


overtime without pay, "habitually return[ing to] their desks after their evening meal". Sickness was feared for workers were rendered impecunious by only short spells of sickness. Subscription lists circulated in department stores, for instance, seeking collective help for sick workers whose pay had been stopped by the firm. Foy and Gibson employees set up a fund to help those "overtaken by misfortune". From the 1890s, the position of the secondary male labour market began to be debated in public. The supply of boys wanting "to wear a black coat, even if it's ragged at the cuffs and shiny at the seams", seemed to be increasing and it was seen as being more important than competition from women:

... the status of clerks cannot be permanently or greatly improved while the supply of them so greatly exceeds demand for their services. Nor are things likely to improve, for it seems that in the coming generation the proportion of youths who prefer driving a quill to driving a plough will increase.

The reformers were worried about male 'genteel slavery'. There was much publicity given to poor bank clerks, for example, who had small wages and much status to uphold. Banks went further than other employers in requiring employee contributions such as fidelity bonds. A fidelity bond was a guarantee by a bank officer to make good, up to a specified amount, any loss caused by the fault of the officer concerned. Most officers took out special insurance policies to provide the bank with the required surety. Considering bank's profits, reformers considered it wrong that bank officers could not afford to marry young. When H. G. Turner entered the Melbourne
branch of the London Joint Stock Bank in 1850 there were 46 staff, and "only the manager, assistant manager, accountant and sub-accountant were married men, and there remained in the rank and file forty-two stalwart bachelors" between 18 and 28. After 1900 poor, unmarried bank clerks were considered an affront to Melbourne society although poor unmarried clerks were not new.

Dual male labour markets of privileged and less privileged workers existed in a number of sectors. Other historians have examined the division between those workers who were permanently-employed and those who were casually or seasonally employed. Even the precarious Victorian building and construction sector had its permanently employed workers. The distinction is important because casual and seasonal workers undermine the value of commonly used wage statistics. The short-term seasonal cycles typical of some occupations were also evident in shop and office employment resulting in unemployment and casual employment. In addition, shop and office workers also experienced seasonal overwork or 'sweating'. Flinders Lane was known as the street of lighthouses, because it was lit-up from end to end during winter nights as clerks struggled at stocktaking and balancing under flickering gas lights for no overtime pay. Tea money of a shilling was paid until some employers found it was spent on counter lunches and what goes with it [at Johnny Connells or some other well-known hostelry]. They then bought tea tickets and distributed them. Not hatred of liquor but fear of unpaid overtime efficiency impaired by a pot of beer was the motive.

Ordinary hours, certainly for most female office workers were 8.30 or 9.00 am to 5.30 or 6 pm (or 1 pm on Saturdays). During the autumn and spring

111 Australasian Insurance and Banking Record, 19 March 1900, p. 910.
113 Jeff Rich, forthcoming PhD thesis, ANU.
115 Clerk, September 1952, 7/5, p. 2, Ted Peters, former president VCU referring to clerks in 1900.
seasons, each lasting for a period of from 12 to 16 weeks, nearly all the Flinders Lane firms had been in the habit of working male employees at least 10 to 12 hours extra weekly. For shops, at Christmas time, 'the seasons' and the sales were the occasions of regular unpaid overtime. Ball and Welch paid their staff on a weekly 50-hour basis, despite the hours worked. Women were employed as casuals at 5d. a day at sale time, but even the senior sales and office staff—who worked forty-five and a half hours per week most weeks—worked unpaid overtime for two months of the year.¹⁶ Foy and Gibson's two fairs in January and July resulted in the staff being "rushed as hard as we can possibly be".¹⁷

Work loads were affected by the depression and its aftermath. While businesses could not afford to mechanize, workloads increased. The Post and Telegraph department converted to the more automated Wheatstone Creed system in 1905. In the five years before the conversion the telegraph workload, for example, had increased 30%.¹十八 Recruitment freezes also contributed to post-depression workload increases. The business of Paterson, Laing and Bruce Ltd., merchants and softgoods warehousemen, grew from 69 salaried employees in 1876 to 228 employees in 1908, in addition to some ancillary staff doing such things as tending horses. The proportion of the counting house to other departments had decreased from 17% to 9% (11% including the new correspondence room staff). Casual staff were less than 5% and were generally employed in the entering or packing room. During the depression the level of counting house staff was maintained as the Graph 3-1 indicates. When stocktaking occurred the staff were required

¹⁶ Ball and Welch, Outward Letter Book, Secretary to Anti-Sweating League, 10 June 1909, Royal Commission on Factories and Shops, 1903, clause 802, Frederick Gray, Secretary Shop Assistants Association.
¹⁷ Royal Commission on Factories and Shops, 1903, clause 2481, William Gibson, Foy and Gibson partner.
¹十八 For comments by a Commonwealth Public Service Inspector on the "abnormal increase of business" from the turn of the century, see Royal Commission on Postal Services, 1910, Minutes, clause 47675, APP, 1910, 5.
to work overtime. This seasonal overwork increased when business began to increase in the late 1890s.

Graph 3-1: Paterson, Laing and Bruce Staff, 1876-1907
Source: Salary Books, ABL, 38/18

During the depression, there had been no recruitment and no promotion for the clerical division of the public service, either.\(^{119}\) Management, desperate for 5th class staff to perform routine duties, recalled a number of retired officers.\(^{120}\) By 1896, departments, with the exception of the Chief Secretary's and the Post and Telegraph, had been reduced to 1884 levels. To cope with work loads that did not decrease, "unnecessary" work was abandoned. The only method of dealing with the increased workloads accompanied by staff freezes was to reorganize. Responsible officers were

---

\(^{119}\) Public Service Board Report, 1892-1896, VPP: 1892-3, 5; 1893, 2; 1895-6, 3; 1896, 2; 1897, 2.

\(^{120}\) ibid., 1897, p.4, VPP, 1898,3.
placed in control of sections whose work was more streamlined. Correspondence systems underwent "simplification". Hours individuals worked increased.

In addition, earlier closing affected workloads. The earlier closing hours began to concentrate shopping on Friday night. When Saturday afternoon closing was made compulsory in 1909, it had the effect of localizing trade. Friday night shopping was increased and casual labour was employed to cope with concentrated shopping on Friday nights, as well as during the increasingly more frequent periods of sales. As Miss Janet Thear, a factory inspector reported in 1909, drapery assistants sometimes complained of "excessive strain on Friday nights because so much shopping is left to be done between 8 pm and 10 pm".\footnote{121} Earlier closing also affected clerks in the Post Office. In 1900 the Public Service Reclassification Board had proposed a reduction in the opening hours and the abolition of double shifts in Victorian country post offices.\footnote{122} From 1911 offices closed at 6 pm instead of 8 pm. The volume of business did not reduce in these years, quite the contrary.

Men were not displaced from the secondary labour market around the turn of the century by women's employment. Indeed, the poor male shop assistant and clerk became primary concerns for the anti-sweating movement. There is evidence that some male's and female's positions both worsened from the 1890s for reasons other than feminization.

Older Men and the Professionalization Movement.
The perception that unskilled girls were displacing well-paid, skilled older men earning £150 per annum or more in the commercial sector is misleading,
too. The Ball and Welch department store wage material shows that all except one of the men earning more than £150 in 1890 had not only recovered from the depression cuts but had salaries averaging 15% above the 1890 benchmark by 1901. At a time when the average salary was dropping, a group of privileged male employees were improving their position. The vehicle they used to do this was the professionalization movement.

As for women, there were complaints about the efficiency of lower white collar male recruits but with a different effect. Witnesses to the Royal Commission on Technical Education, were unanimous in their concern about ensuring a constant supply of skilled male youths to business. It was noted that well-trained young clerks were well-paid:

There can be no doubt that one of the principal causes of the low rate of wages existing in the clerical profession is the incompetency of many of those who are entering that profession.123

The Accountants' and Clerks' Association's representatives declared that young men were incompetent as clerks. It was claimed that 90% of youths entering offices could not write properly. Of the "50 or 60 applicants for every vacancy" only two or three were efficient writers. Moreover, most were not properly trained in bookkeeping, arithmetic, mercantile geography and shorthand. Sidney Stott, a business college proprietor, similarly confirmed the demand for trained male clerks from his college far exceeded the supply. The Melbourne Chamber of Commerce praised Stott and Hoare's enterprise in establishing a business college and suggested that the only contribution that the state should make to commercial education was to provide a curriculum and examination system through the Melbourne University for youths.124 But it was referring only to male youths.

---

124 ibid., pp. 208-15, section on 'Commercial Education'. 
The University of Melbourne established junior and senior commercial examinations in 1905. This decision was significant for two reasons. First, specialized commercial training was established outside ordinary schooling. The Commission specifically warned against integrating specialized commercial courses into state school curricula in competition with private education. Secondly, three grades of commercial training were outlined: vocational commercial 'technical training' for 14 to 18 year olds along the lines of classes offered by Stott and Hoare's Business College and the Mechanics Institute; night schools for youths already employed in business; and university co-ordinated commercial education leading to diplomas. A university commerce faculty was also mooted.

There was a demand for commercial credentials from the 1880s. This was not met by a continental system of business schools such as the Institute Superieur de Commerce in Antwerp teaching practical bookkeeping and office organization as was suggested by the President of the Chamber of Commerce in 1887. Instead, leading Victorian accountants and managers became associated with the establishment of professional institutes. For instance, the Australian Institute of Accountants (Victoria) was established in 1887, the Federal Institute of Accountants in 1894, the Society of Accountants and Auditors of England in 1891 and a separate Victorian society in 1900, and the Society of Accountants (Incorporated) and Auditors of Victoria (Incorporated).

These institutes admitted to membership only those who had passed its examinations. The Commonwealth Institute of Accountants established the first professional clerical exams in 1886. In 1887, the Bankers' Institute established junior and senior banking exams. The junior exam involved

125 Age, 11 May 1887.
126 For business men's biographies, see James Smith, ed., Cyclopedia of Victoria, 1, Melbourne, 1903, pp. 393-404.
geography, English, penmanship, dictation, bookkeeping and arithmetic. E. S. Parkes, the Superintendent of the Bank of Australasia announced he was prepared to require all his junior clerks to sit the Institute's compulsory exams. In 1888, there were 96 candidates, mostly Victorians and only eight failed. The Incorporated Institute of Accountants, was founded in England in 1885 and an affiliated organization was established in Victoria in 1886. Its objective was to elevate the accountancy profession and to increase community confidence in auditors by assuring they were well-qualified. It instituted examinations from 1889 (for one person). No-one was admitted without examination after 1893 and from 1898 examinations were standardized in Australia and New Zealand. The other institutes followed suit: The Insurance Institute of Victoria, for instance, conducted its first examination in 1899 in competition with the higher examination of the Institute of Actuaries, a London organization.

The State offered jobs, promotions and substantial increments in some cases to those who passed its examinations. In 1891, the public service board had been encouraging officers to qualify in shorthand. The Law, Trade and Customs, Postal and Lands departments held weekly shorthand classes. The Central Business College prospectus of 1905 pointed out that Francis Smith (one of its students) of the Accountants Branch, Head Office, Victoria, earned a special increment of £15 for passing the Railway Clerical exam. Other employers used the state exams as a reference, instituted or were

---

127 Age, 30 June 1887.
129 Smith, ed., Cyclopedia of Victoria, 1, 1903, p. 392.
130 Examinations included the following: Commonwealth Clerical Division, Commonwealth General Division, State Clerical Division, State Clerical Division, Railway Clerical, Telephone Attendants, Postal Service, Post Office Promotion, Inspector's, Engine and Boiler Attendants, Surveyor's.
131 Public Service Board Report, 1891, p. 12, VPP, 1891, 6.
required by law to conduct their own exams such as under Local Government Act or Companies Act. 133

The institutes' examinations spawned a number of coaching classes. Melbourne's first business college, Stott and Hoare's, established in 1885, had concentrated on preparing its students for the Law Courts' Shorthand exams. Around the turn of the century, it was specializing in bookkeeping and accountancy. A number of other establishments—such as Mr Jobsen's actuary's student class of 14—prepared men part-time by correspondence and at night for the recruitment exams which were proliferating. 134 By 1908, Stott's was advertising that it prepared students for most exams: Commonwealth Clerical Division, Commonwealth General Division, State Clerical, State General, Railway Clerical, Bankers' Institute, University Commercial, Postal Service, Municipal Clerks', Licensed Auditors' and Telephone Attendants' exams.

White collar associations were laying the infrastructure for the formation of an educated primary labour market. In a labour market which could be seen as homogenizing with universal education, groups of male clerical workers were prepared to gain recognized qualifications to differentiate themselves from other workers. Accreditation was clearly associated with ambition. At a time when trade unionism did not exist these white collar accreditation associations were relatively well-organized. In 1900 or 1901, the Insurance Institute of Victoria had 166 members, the English Society of Accountants and Auditors had 54 members in Victoria, the Institute of Accountants had 234 members and the Federal Institute of Accountants had 94 fellows and 60 associates. Before the establishment of wages boards in 1907 and 1911, shop and office unions were only fitful. Before 1907 the Grocers' Union, for

133 For example, the oldest was the Law Courts' Licensed Shorthand exam.
134 Australasian Insurance and Banking Record, 19 May 1900, p. 404.
example, was at its most active over early closing in the 1880s and during the sittings of the Royal Commission into the Shops and Factories Act between 1901 and 1903. The union's membership peaked at 600 in 1901, collapsed and slowly rose to 300 by 1909. The retail and clerical unions were reluctant to join the Victorian Trades Hall Council before 1908. The institutes were much more actively concerned with status, skill and labour supply and up to the time of the wages boards had more members than the unions.

Unlike other professions in which education was an attribute, business appeared more reluctant to accept qualified women on an equal basis even in isolated cases. Turnover figures suggest that it would not have been more costly to individual firms to extend to women the training given to men. The Victoria census gives 457 public accountants and 76 trustees and executives and a feminization proportion of 0.08%. At a time when the first women were being registered as doctors and lawyers, the Incorporated Institute of Accountants "by an overwhelming majority" voted against the admission of women members. The applicant in 1899 was Miss Fenton, sister of the Victorian Government Statistician. The institute did not relent on its refusal to admit women until World War One. Women's position was clearly down at the bottom of the labour hierarchy.

The establishment of facilities for higher accreditation for young men in commerce were matters which the State did not legislate for. They were also a development which the early feminists did not anticipate. At the same time as women were overcoming some educational inequalities, others were being created.

135 Grocers' Union Minutes, 6 August 1901, ABL, T21/1.
136 Census of Victoria, 1901, Occupations of the People, Table 2.
137 Tocsin, 16 November 1899. Women not permitted to sit examinations until 1916.
3.5 Conclusion: a workforce dividing by sex and age by 1907

The theme of much of the recent literature on the sexual division of labour at the turn of the century emphasizes political-ideological discrimination as the crucial factor determining women's poor, and possibly deteriorating, labour market position. Protective labour legislation and the arbitration tribunals are important to this argument. This chapter has concentrated upon the period before shop and office workers won access to arbitration. It has been established that protective labour legislation was applied to female retail and clerical workers only in isolated instances, such as a prohibition against night work for telegraphists. Early feminist reformers were not as zealous in seeking protection for women in respectable white collar employment as they were for women in factory employment. We would have to conclude that the introduction of protective labour legislation and formal discrimination did not have as great an impact on women's shop and office work as some of its critics have suggested. State regulation formalized rather than instituted a secondary labour market for some women. Given the decreasing importance of government employment in the overall market, the non-regulated labour market reveals that the forces promoting sex segregation, horizontal and vertical, were more diffuse.

Rather than political-ideological impositions, I have argued that another development was more significant to women's labour market position. There was a divergence between larger growing business and smaller business. Developing larger workplaces had diffuse labour demands. First, larger growing business demanded systems for generating standardized skilled male workers. Instead of learning skills on the job, skills could be acquired outside the workplace. Women did not have access to institutes accrediting these new skills. Secondly, while in the 1880s women were forcing themselves on doubtful employers, by the turn of the century employers were trying to attract women. The vast majority of women in paid employment in the
economy were young, single women. The new female recruits were younger than their counterparts in the 1880s and were paid less. The position of these women in the larger developing workplaces was not necessarily poor. Women's position in small business had never been good or uniformly bad. Women's secondary labour market position in terms of pay does not automatically mean that women were encouraged to be unskilled and poor employees. Segregation meant that some women were skilled and well-paid.

The proletarianization thesis as applied to Victorian commerce at the turn of the century, then, overlooks two groups, ambitious males and young single women for whom a 'paradise' cannot be seen to have been lost in the feminization pattern. They welcomed their opportunities.
A Clerks' Union?

The unmanly factory clerk, Benno, drawn by Will Dyson to illustrate Edward Dyson's narrative was the popular stereotype of a clerk. Benno was pimply, thin, pale and could not afford manly vices, "his Savings Bank pass-book was tattered and limp and stained with long service". He was in short, insipid and poor.

15. Clerks' Wages Board Cartoon, 1912
Even in those days, with the recently announced Harvester decision, fixing a wage of 42/- a week as a fair and reasonable wage for unskilled labour, hundreds of cases of bad underpayment of clerks were being exposed. The ruling rate of clerks was in the neighbourhood of 25/- to 30/- a week. Even in those days the union was strong in its determination to seek equal pay for men and women in the clerical industry. Nowadays, this is known as equal pay for the sexes. In the early days of the union, the slogan had been coined "equal pay for equal work". The union was determined to fight for this principle when the wages board was established...[when equal pay was won] it was described as ruinous, as the prelude to bankruptcy and likely to have sinister effects both upon business and upon clerical workers. When one realizes that the average typist and stenographer was paid anything between 20/- and 30/- per week, one appreciates that the rate of 45/- per week, which conservatively could be regarded as doubling the wages of women workers, was most bitterly resented by employers.
The Clerk, 7/6, October-November 1952, p. 2. P. J. Clarey, former Secretary VCU.
Mr. E. Chambers, secretary of the Clerks' Union and member of the Clerks' Wages Board, is biffing the Fat Employer badly, and is battling to secure equal pay for equal work, irrespective of whether the said work is executed by male or female labor. Fat wants to induce Chief Secretary Murray to remove Chambers from the board on the ground that he is a "disturbing element." It is urged that if girl typists and stenographers are to receive wages equal to male typists and stenographers, the girls will all get the sack. The reply is that even if female labor is thus reduced and male labor is in greater demand in a corresponding ratio, there will be more men able to keep a wife. That being so, the girls stand on velvet. "It's heads we win, and tails Fat loses," they say, and consequently they are sending Chambers on all they know in the game of stoush. The Muse:

Chambers, Member of the Board,
Wants equal pay for equal work;
And as he utters "By the Lord!"
He brings old Fat up with a jerk—
With a big and bally jerk.

The girls (thinking of the "gonce")
Admire his mighty bone and then—
If Chambers doth get all he want—
And Fat won't pay the girls' crew—
Then—'p'sape a husband each will do!
16. Eleanor Cameron, Secretary Women's Typist Association, 1911

[Eleanor Cameron said] Our members realise the conditions advocated by the Clerks' Union would soon oust their sex from this occupation; but doubtless, Mr Chambers would not object to women being the hewers of wood to the community, providing they left the playing on the typewriter to men of his own calibre...Many girls stood up in the meeting and stated that they had been dismissed already, others that they had received notice that as soon as the proposals of the labour representatives became law they would have to go, and they wanted the board to hear their views before coming to a decision which would be the means of throwing many out of employment.

Argus, 13 November 1912 and 4 February 1913.

17. Delegates to the Victorian Trades Hall Council's Conference on Women, 1912

The organisers of women into unions are remarkably ambitious if they hope to challenge men on their own fields of work. The women's section of the Clerks' Union appears to have deliberately set its cap at equal rates of pay; and when the decision was announced, its leaders applauded vigorously, and declared that the age of chivalry was not dead.

Punch, 24 October 1912.
Chapter Four: 
Unions and Divisions; The Case of Equal Pay for Shop and Office Workers 1908-1922

Mr Starke (appearing for the employers): The plea of equal pay for the sexes is a selfish one raised by the men for the express purpose of drawing the women out of the occupation.
Mr Clarey (Secretary of the Federated Clerks' Union): No it is a matter of justice for women. The employer gets the same return for work whether it is performed by male or female clerks. The appeal for lower rates for women is selfishness on the part of the employer who desires the same value as received from a man at less than the man's rate... You intimidated and frightened women by threatening them with dismissal when you knew there were not sufficient men available to take their place.1

4.1 Male and Female Compacts?
Retail and clerical workers' unions gained access to Victoria's arbitration tribunals from 1907 and 1911, respectively. This is said to have promoted the organizational and structural division in the workforce between men and women.2 It is argued that male retail and clerical unionists craftily adopted a strategy of seeking equal pay in arbitration cases in order to protect their jobs from women's encroachment. They sought to exclude women, or at least, rigidly segregate women in the poorest jobs. Employers resisted unions' attempts to exclude women. They wished to ensure that their profits were maximized by employing cheap female labour. Male employers and unionists, for different reasons, agreed that women workers should remain poorly remunerated.

The theme that male solidarity in the trade union movement and arbitration tribunals was a new disadvantage for women is central to feminist

1 Woman Voter. 24 November 1914. Extract from evidence given in the Court of Industrial Appeal re-clerks equal pay case.
Patriarchal ideology united male unionists and employers in a 'male compact' against women. The establishment of trade unions and arbitration tribunals in Australia were, consequently, retrograde turning points for women's employment. Two Commonwealth Arbitration Court judgements by Justice Higgins are singled out for criticism: the Harvester or 'family wage' decision in 1907 and the Mildura Fruit Pickers decision in 1912. These decisions set precedents for jobs to be classified as male or female. A basic minimum, or 'family', wage was set for unskilled males which was said to be sufficient to support a family of five. Females, who it was argued had no dependants to support, received half the family wage. The trade union movement, it has been argued, was wrong to acquiesce in these decisions. The failure of the trade union movement to adopt, instead, a genuine and concerted equal pay strategy weakened the trade union and working class movements.

There have been some revisions of the standard interpretation. Some historians have questioned whether the arbitration system was an unmitigated

---

3 For a seminal feminist article on the subject, see Heidi Hartman, 'Capitalism, Patriarchy and Job Segregation by Sex', in Martha Blaxall and Barbara Reagan, eds., Women and the Workplace: The Implications of Occupational Segregation, Chicago, 1976, pp. 137-69.
6 Thelma Hunter, 'Industrial Courts and Women's Wages in Australia', Economic Record, December 1962, 38, pp. 438-52, discusses in more detail the two major criteria determining women's wages, the "needs" criteria or family wage established in the 1907 Harvester decision and the "class of work" criteria established in the Mildura Fruit Pickers 1912 decision. See the decisions: Ex parte, H. V. McKay, Commonwealth Arbitration Reports, (CAR), 2, 1907; Rural Workers' Union and United Labourers' Union v. Mildura Branch of the Dried Fruits Association and Others, CAR, 6, 1912.
7 Ryan, Two-Thirds a Man, p. 178.
disaster for women. It has been pointed out, for instance, that early wages tribunals set generous wages for female probationers who had previously worked for nothing and set minimums higher than previously for women.8 Others have argued that the early minimum wage decisions merely standardized the wages fixed under the 'free play of market forces'.9 The Arbitration Court merely formalized male and female segregation already existing in the workplace. The Court could not violate established practices because it was under the constant threat of abolition. It could not afford to alienate the ruling orthodoxy.10 Some have gone so far as to argue that arbitration tribunals and unions did not influence the feminization process at all.11 Revisionists' arguments, then, have pointed to women's limited benefits under arbitration and have questioned the possibility of the courts or unions successfully promoting gender equality in waged labour in the context of their times. They have left the standard 'gender' interpretation of unionists' and employers' 'male compact', however, intact.

This chapter questions whether women's continuing inequality can be explained simply by male sexism.12 The gender explanation, epitomized in the notion that unions could have won equal pay if they had wanted to, does not take into account two factors: that some unions attempted to win equal

---

12 Among those who have argued, more generally, that protecting the breadwinner should not be dismissed as sexism are: Ann Curthoys, For and Against Feminism: A personal journey into feminist theory and history, Sydney, 1988, pp. 57-58; Jane Humphries, 'Class Struggle and the Persistence of the Working-Class Family', Cambridge Journal of Economics, 1, September 1977, pp. 241-58.
pay and failed; and that divisions within some unions on the issue cannot be reduced to a simple gender division. The Victorian Clerks' Union is a case in point. The union's unsuccessful attempt to win equal pay is considered in the wider context of the Victorian trade union movement. It tests the gender explanation.

The union was unsuccessful, first, because most workers did not regard the issue as simply one of working women's pay equity. Justice to young single women in the paid workforce could mean injustice to married women and children in the home. Many women workers supported the principle of higher pay for men embodied in the family wage. We should not dismiss them as having 'false consciousness' or for enfeebling the working class. Instead, we need to examine in some detail why the Clerks' Union and the feminist movement failed to mobilize working women for equal pay.

The union did not win equal pay, secondly, because employers opposed it. Employers did not simply wish to subordinate women. They had a bigger agenda. Employers were concerned to engender division amongst their workers to prevent a united workers' front. A developing division of labour is sometimes regarded as the principal way employers controlled their workers: 'segmented work; divided workers'. Segmented working conditions also achieved division. Pay uniformity was to be avoided as much as possible. Equal pay was the first of many union claims for uniform conditions across the sector. It was to the employers' advantage to encourage fears that males and females were competing cheek by jowl. They used the equal pay issue to divide the union. The Victorian Clerks' Union's failed equal pay campaign shows, then, the limits of male collaboration.
4.2 Workers Divided by Arbitration

Shop and office unionism was relatively weak. At the turn of the century, shop and office workers in Victoria were regarded as a "helpless class not able to organize in unions and to protect themselves". The reason usually given was the variety of retail and clerical positions which "could not be said of any class of artisans". Retail and clerical workers organized intermittently before 1907. The establishment of wages boards for shop and office workers was largely responsible for viable unions. Wages boards were first established by Parliament in 1896 to fix minimum wages and piece work rates by negotiation between workers' and employers' representatives for any "process, trade or business" conducted in a factory. The legislation had to be amended before shop and office workers could be considered. In 1907, wages boards for 'non-factory' trades, such as retail trading, were permitted and, in 1911, wages boards for 'occupations', such as clerking, were permitted. Even then, the establishment of wages boards only facilitated shop assistants' and clerks' unionism to a point. Wages board and union coverage was limited prohibiting, for instance, the formation of two big industrial unions. As well, even those supporting 'moral suasion', or encouraging employers to act decently without regulation, organized themselves.

There were two rival industrial unions between 1909 and 1918 competing amongst retail assistants for members. In addition, there were retail clubs, such as the Victorian Hardware and Trades' Association, formed in 1894, which had 700 members by 1910. These clubs were antipathetic to both industrial unions and wages boards. Nevertheless, early in 1907, a

14 Clerk, 1/1, 25 July 1911.
15 Age, 3 December 1910. Shop Assistants' Union (SAU) Minutes, 14 September 1910, Archives of Business and Labour (ABL), T21/6/1.
Shop Assistants' Union had been reformed to co-ordinate the collection of signatures for petitions to Parliament calling on it to use its legislative powers to establish a wages board for shop assistants. It affiliated with the Victorian Trades Hall Council. A Grocers' Union was revived in 1909 after being dormant since 1903 when it had organized workers to give evidence to the Royal Commission into the Factories Act. The Trades Hall Council was opposed to a "multiplicity of craft unions" and mediated in several attempts to amalgamate the unions before being successful in 1918. Even if we allow, perhaps too generously, that the unions had a combined strength of 1500 members, they represented only 6.5% of retail assistants in 1911.

Shop unions were not close-knit nationally, either. The Victorian branch prepared to apply to the federal arbitration court for an award after a federal conference of shop assistants in Sydney in 1909. The advantage of winning a federal award was that federal conditions, such as those established by the Harvester decision were better than state conditions and would apply to the whole industry immediately. The employers refused to meet with federal representatives to make a federal agreement. The weak shop assistants' federation collapsed in 1910 and did not reappear until 1915.

Clerical unionism in Victoria was not much stronger. Between 1912 and 1920, there were three clerical unions: the Clerks' Union, having three representatives on the wages board; the Accountants' and Clerks' Association with two representatives; and the Ladies Shorthand Writers' and Typists' Association with one representative. The Clerks' Association was first established in 1897 and, by 1911, it had 832 full members and 624 'students'. It was presided over by R. Murray Smith, a prominent bank director.

17 The Grocer's Union (GU) had 200 members in June 1909 which had grown to 533 members in June 1910. This was still less than 600 members it claimed in August 1901. The GU estimated that the SAU had 350 financial members in 1910. In May 1911, the SAU celebrated reaching 1000 members, however, in June there were only 871 members on the books and only 544 of these were strictly financial. In 1919, the 2485 members made up 8.7% of the shop assistants in registered shops. ABL, T21.
and Legislative Council member. It promoted education amongst its members and supported moral suasion. The Clerks' Union formed in 1900 with 62 members was dormant until 1910. Its membership reached 800, or 12% of the estimated 5973 commercial clerks in Melbourne, by 1911. About the same time, the Ladies' Association, had 155 members or 13% of women clerks. Relations between these groups were acrimonious. The Victorian Clerks' Union eventually predominated. It also dominated the clerks' unions' federation. A federation of South Australian, New South Wales and Victorian clerical unions was entered on the Commonwealth register in 1911 but it was nominal. A reformed Federated Clerks' Union in 1915 was made up of branches in five states but the meetings of the Victorian union followed the federation’s meetings: the Melbourne executive virtually ran 'the federation'.

Both the Shop Assistants' and the Clerks' unions attempted to organize every worker in their respective industries in Victoria: all those engaged in the sale, receipt or delivery of goods in the retail industry; and all persons employed in any office, store, factory, warehouse, shop or place of business in a clerical capacity. The arbitration system, however, prevented this. Shop and office workers won access to arbitration in a piecemeal fashion. In the process, sections of workers were dealt with separately and diversely.

---

18 *Age*, 3 December 1901 and 30 March 1904.
19 For relations between the Victorian Clerks' Union (VCU) and the Accountant's and Clerks' Association (ACA)-which disbanded in 1920, see: *Age*, 22 January 1904, *The Clerk*, 18 October 1911, 7 October 1917 and 7 January 1918, pp. 53-54; and September, October-November 1952; December-January 1952-3. February-March 1956. The Chief Inspector of Factories' Report (CIFR) sample covered 13177 commercial clerks in 1921, *Victorian Parliamentary Papers (VPP)*. The union claimed 4000 members (*Age*, 20 February 1920) although it mustered only 1365, or 10% of clerks, for a petition.
20 In 1914-15, the New South Wales (NSW) union had a membership of 800 and the South Australian branch had 400.
First, arbitration procedures for state public servants were introduced in the 1883 Public Service Act and for Commonwealth public servants under a 1902 Act. About 10% of the Australian workforce was in government employment at the turn of the century, rising to a peak before 1939 of 14.5% in 1926.22 These public servants were not permitted to join with private sector employee unions. Even when the Clerks' Union represented temporary clerks in Commonwealth employment in 1916, a separate Commonwealth award was granted. The federal court refused to give preference of employment to Clerks' Union members which might have strengthened the union.23 Clerical, counter and store staff in the public service organized federally, for instance, in the Federation of Salaried Officers of the Railways Commissioners and the Federated Public Service Assistants' Association.

Secondly, most shop and office workers were provided for under Victoria's wages boards. The wages boards were introduced progressively. Only six wages boards were originally established under the 1896 Factories and Shops Act for private sector workers. As Table 4-1 indicates, by 1901, 6% of the breadwinners in Victoria were under wages boards, 23% in 1911, 26% by 1921 and 30% by the late 1930s.


23 Federated Clerks' Union of Australia v. Commonwealth of Australia, the Commonwealth Public Service Commissioner and Others, *CAR*, 10, 1916, pp. 16-111. The Courts' reason for refusing preference was that 1700 temporary clerks gave 32 different 'previous occupations', that is, the work they were employed in prior to casual clerking.
Table 4.1: Extent of Victorian Wages Boards, 1901-1936

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Wages Boards</th>
<th>Workers Covered</th>
<th>Breadwinners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>30,000</td>
<td>533,977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>49,500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>130,000</td>
<td>577,053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>150,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>171,000</td>
<td>659,053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>205,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>162,500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>181</td>
<td>182,039</td>
<td>766,597</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>226,000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Shops assistants' also won wages boards progressively and along sectional lines. There were six shops boards by 1910 and over 20 by 1930. Workers met separately to discuss their wages board matters. The clerks' wages board, established in 1912, applied to two-thirds of urban commercial clerks. Banks, insurance companies, building societies, friendly societies, trustee companies and legal firms were exempt. Building and friendly society clerks' exemption was lifted and a separate award was made for legal clerks in 1923. The occupations were further subdivided in the determinations with metropolitan and country workers often considered on a separate basis. Country shop assistants were dealt with separately from 1912 and it was not until 1925 that the commercial clerks outside the urban areas were included in the commercial clerks determination.

Thirdly, some private sector groups, perhaps a sixth of the workforce by the late 1920s, were covered by federal awards. Bank clerks and financial-

---

24 CIFR. 1901-1936. The figures are only for the wages boards that had completed deliberations; for example, it was estimated in 1901 that when all 38 special boards had completed deliberations they would cover 35000 workers, 1901, pp. 9-11 VPP. 1902, 2. Census of Victoria, 1901, Census of the Commonwealth, 1911, 1921, 1933, Occupations of the People.
25 For example, wages boards were agreed to by the Legislative Council for drapery and grocery assistants in 1909, boot, hardware, and stationery assistants in 1910, furniture dealers, country shop assistants and clerks in 1911 and so on.
26 Victoria Labour and Industry Department, Summary of Wages and Conditions Fixed by Wages Boards or by Court of Industrial Appeal, Victoria Labour and Industry Department, 1918-39. CIFR, 1909-1918, VPP.
27 In 1928, the deputy Industrial Registrar of the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration furnished commissioners with a statement of federal awards listing 82 awards covering approximately 421250 workers- workers in 15 occupations were not
insurance clerks applied to the Commonwealth Arbitration Court and did not win their first awards until 1924.28 Clerical workers employed by local government and tramway companies were included in industrial awards by the federal court. These legal divisions were reinforced by separate organizations: after World War One, bank officers formed the United Bank Officers' Association, insurance workers formed the Australian Insurance Staffs' Federation and municipal clerks formed their own Officers' Association.

Most shop and office workers eventually gained access to arbitration, then. Arbitration divided them in three ways. Public service workers were dealt with separately from private sector workers. The separate State and Commonwealth industrial tribunals issued separate awards along different guidelines. There was a multiplicity of Victorian wages board awards dealing with different groups of shop and office workers.

Employers supported an arbitration system which undermined the building of strong unionism. The large shop managers, for instance, were pro-wages boards. Ball and Welch told the Anti-Sweating League that it's managing director, Ian McIntosh, had "instigated" the drapery wages board.29 These large shops managers realized from the operation of wages boards covering their manufacturing operations that they had nothing to fear from arbitration. Arbitration held out the hope of reducing competition from small competitors in Victoria who underpaid workers. Moreover, as Ball and Welch's secretary

enumerated but the number of Australian Railway Union employees was estimated. These awards covered about 17% of the Australian workforce. Minutes of the Royal Commission on the Child Endowment, Melbourne, 1928, clause 24911.

28 Bank Officials' Association v. Bank of Australasia and Others, and Australian Insurance Staffs' Federation v. Accident Underwriters Association and Others, CAR, 19, 1924, pp. 208-238 and 272-302. Commonwealth Bank officers were treated as public servants and given a right of appeal to the federal arbitration court in 1911.

29 Ball and Welch, Outward Letter Book, 10 June 1909, University of Melbourne Archives (UOMA).
informed his Hordern Brothers' counterpart in Sidney in May 1908, "by creating a Board to cover employees it would thus work against the Federal Arbitration Act". Employers realized that a national union would be formed to represent all workers in a federal case and it would seek a ruling for all retail workers on the basis of Higgin's basic minimum wage judgement which was higher than the Victorian wages boards were awarding.30

By the 1920s, shop and office organization was divided. In 1912, the Clerks' Union had law, bank and insurance clerks' sections but by the 1920s these groups had formed their own associations and had secured their own awards. When the question of whether all clerks should unite into one union was canvassed in 1924, the insurance officers objected, pointing out that Clerks' Union had a lower minimum rate. Moreover, the Clerks' Union "supported equal pay".31

**Shop Assistants' and Clerks' Unions Support Pay Uniformity**

Both the Shop Assistants' and Clerks' Unions argued for equal pay from when they were permitted access to wages boards. There were strategic and ideological reasons for doing so. Some groups of workers, mostly highly unionized male workers, were strong and won higher rates of pay. H. M. Murphy, Secretary to the Department of Labour in Melbourne, identified two "influences" which adversely affected shop and office unions' bargaining power in the tribunals: their unions were not powerful or well organized and there were growing numbers of women in their occupations.32

---

30 ibid., 6 May 1908.
31 Minutes of the Australian Insurance Staffs' Federation, Victorian branch, 7 July 1924 and 15 June 1925, ABL, E98.
shop assistants by 1910. The unions' support for equal pay lay in the fact that they represented occupations which had above-average growth rates of women.

The Clerks' Union's executive supported equal pay because it accepted that women clerks were there to stay in the occupation. It had a responsibility to represent males and females. The proportion of clerical workers who were women rose steadily from about 3% to 55% between 1880 and 1939. In 1911 women still made up only 28% of the clerical occupation, but the executive was committed to their cause. It did not believe that women could be excluded from the occupation nor that they threatened male jobs. Men and women were largely non-competing groups employed under different conditions. While the fringes between work designated male or female was hazy, women's participation was basically different from men's. There was sexual segregation. Moreover, this was the era of the single business girl. Most women in commerce before the 1930s worked in undisputed 'women's work', were young and unmarried and stopped paid work when they married. The executive repeatedly asserted women's competency and right to equal pay.

As the number of young single women in the occupation increased, the union executive called for a higher basic wage for women. It perceived a danger to its industrial aims in the structural division of the workforce. The threat was that the occupation would increasingly be considered an unskilled women's occupation if women clerks were paid less than men. The rate at which clerks' basic wage was set was important for any classification they

---

33 VCU to Premier and Minister of Labour, 23 September 1910, PRO 5466/41, and VCU to CIF on the basis of 1910 returns the VCU estimated women made up over 20% of 5973 Melbourne commercial clerks. In the first register of shop assistants in 1915, women made up 31% of the total, CIFR, 1915, VPP, 1916, 2.
34 See, for example: Edward Chambers, Argus, 2 January 1913; Frederick Katz, Woman Voter, 21 June 1916.
could hope to win. Classification involved the ordering of jobs by degree of skill which could be established in the courts and the fixing of rates accordingly.\textsuperscript{35} As the primary labour market of good, stable and well-rewarded jobs developed there was a groundswell of male support for regulated margins for skill over the basic wage. The executive, then, regarded equal pay as vital in the long term for its claims for classification gradings based on skill and responsibility.

The Clerks' Union's executive cultivated a relationship with a group of women in the workforce to present a strong case. A woman's section of the Clerks' Union was established in 1911, after the first mass meeting to discuss wages board proposals and representation. At the president, Tom Coffey's bidding, a woman, Rose Lawler, a 23 year old clerical assistant at a drapery shop, was elected as one of the three union advocates.\textsuperscript{36} The committee of management employed an experienced organizer, Ellen Mulcahy, to organize typists and female clerks.\textsuperscript{37} Mulcahy set up a business and typing agency at the same time as she was organizing women.\textsuperscript{38} Muriel Heagney, a labour activist working as a defence department clerk and Hilda Moody, a Melbourne Tramway and Omnibus Company clerk since 1888, were among the women who represented the union on the Victorian Trades Hall Council.\textsuperscript{39} Equal pay and organizing women members were union priorities, as the union's secretary, Jack Smith, proudly told Trades Hall in 1923:


\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Age}, 23 August 1910.

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Clerk}, 1/1, 25 July 1911.

\textsuperscript{38} \textit{Labor Call}, 13 February 1913.

\textsuperscript{39} Muriel Heagney and her mother represented the Hawkers' and Dealers' Union at the Women's Convention held at the Trades Hall in October 1912, \textit{Labor Call}, 24 October 1912. Moody, a checking clerk for the Melbourne Tramway and Omnibus Company experienced the repercussions of being a union representative a few years later. She was sacked after 28 years service for being absent without leave for one day, \textit{Victorian Trades Hall Council (VTHC) Minutes}, 23 November 1916, ABL, M14.
since 1914 the male members of [the] union had increased 33 per cent and the membership of women had increased by 400 per cent.\textsuperscript{40}

Officially, the Shop Assistants' Union also supported equal pay. The executive urged representatives, such as those on the boot board in 1912, to obtain the "highest possible wage for women workers" in order to help other boards. Indeed, the executive asked a boot board representative to resign because he was not prepared to support the principle of equal pay for equal work. The union described the reversal of an equal pay decision in 1913 as having "caused an irreparable injury to women". By October 1920, however, the union decided not to demand equal pay in the Drapers' Board, the board covering the greatest number of shop assistants. It decided to ask for £6 per week for adult men and 63 shillings, or 53% the male rate, for adult females.\textsuperscript{41} The union's four objectives were to achieve the eight-hour day, to regulate casual employment, to have overtime paid at time and a half with one shilling teamoney and to stop Saturday trading. The union did not support equal pay and became a poor advocate for its women members. Between 1921 and 1927, for example, while the adult male rate in the drapers' determination rose 10%, the female rate remained static. Indeed, the female drapery assistants' award rates remained unchanged from 1921 to 1939. Clerking feminized as much as shop assisting but, in the period 1921 to 1939, clerking wages increased 9 to 12% and typists 11 to 17%.\textsuperscript{42}

The Shop Assistants' Union's local officials recruited an unusually high number of women from July 1908. In January 1919, women made up 40% of the union in the earliest existent union membership survey which is disaggregated by sex. Indeed, outside Melbourne, principally in Geelong,
Ballarat and Bendigo, women made up 63% of the small union membership.\textsuperscript{43} The admission of women as shop stewards in 1911 facilitated the recruitment of female unionists. No women attended the state meetings, however. Moreover, in 1918 the grocers and warehousemen joined the shop assistants to form the Shop Assistants' and Warehouse Employees' Federation of Australia. Thereafter, even women's nominal unionism dropped. The grocers and warehousemen had to take a ballot even to consider the question of female labour in 1916. They were more antipathetic than the Shop Assistants' Union's executive was to women.

The Shop Assistants' and Clerks' Unions had different equal pay strategies and these differences were significant. While both unions failed to curb feminization, they were not equally successful in winning wage increases for women. Leadership differed and these differences were important in making opportunities for women to become involved in unions. What distinguished the unions, then, was an executive sympathetic to equal pay and a clique of women determined, and given the opportunity, to work for equal pay. The Shop Assistants' Union was more representative of the unions affiliated to the Victorian Trades Hall Council. The Trades Hall Council's equal pay policy was the Shop Assistant's Union's policy writ large. Representatives of the Clerks' Union tried hard, however, to change that policy.

**Equal Pay and Trade Union Solidarity?**

It is clear that unions affiliated to the Trades Hall Council did not support equal pay at the turn of the century. The first calls for equal pay by union representatives in the Victorian wages boards and the first proposal for equal pay to be written into wages boards legislation in 1903 were designed to

\textsuperscript{43} SAU Minutes, 1919 membership survey. Of the total union membership of 2485: 1486, or 60%, were males and 999, or 40%, were females. Of the total country membership of 462, 172, or 37%, were males and 290, or 63%, were females.
exclude or "decrease the number of females" working in industries. The Woman's Political Association complained that from 1891 to 1908 equal pay was never ever spoken of, except by a few members of the Labor Party and then only as a matter of abstract justice.

Thereafter, however, there was more ambivalence on the issue of equal pay and women workers among unions than has been recognized.

From about 1908, equal pay increasingly began to be debated in Victorian Trades Hall Council circles. This change was related to its changing composition. Representatives from those unions in occupations with a growing proportion of female workers, such as the Clerks' Union, raised the equal pay issue. From 1890 to 1914, the category of service and other unions which included commercial workers' unions, grew as a proportion of all Trades Hall Council affiliates from a tenth to nearly a third. This change, in turn, was related to the Women's Organizing Committee. A conference of women called by the Political Labor Council in 1903 had resulted in the formation of the Women's Organizing Committee. Committee members were responsible for the first Victorian Labor Women's Political Conference which was held in the Trades Hall in June 1909. As a result of this conference, trade unions supported Labor Party women organizers. Lillian Locke, Amy Whittle, Harriet Powell, Minnie Felstead and Ellen Mulcahy organized working women and advocated equal pay.

In 1910, Felstead was elected to the Trades Hall Council's Organizing Committee. She lobbied for a special Trades Hall Council's women's organizing committee.

---

45 Woman Voter, 11 November 1912 and 17 February 1914.
46 P. G. Macarthy, 'Victorian Trade Union Statistics, 1889-1914', Labour History, 18, May 1970, pp. 72-74. The proportion of 'services and miscellaneous' unions' subventions grew from 4% to 25% of all subventions.
48 Other VCU women organizers came from this labour party-union background, notably Muriel Heagney who was employed the VTHC central executive to organize in Ballarat and Colac in 1913. ibid., Biography, unpublished paper, 1/45/1 (a).
established a Women's Organizing Fund and was employed as women's organizer on £3 a week for six months.\(^{49}\) By 1912, there were 31 female unions or female sections of unions in Melbourne.\(^{50}\)

Representatives of these unions lobbied the Trades Hall Council to promote equal pay. In August 1913, for example, the Female Hotel and Caterers' Union representative, Sarah Lewis, attempted to get unions to launch an equal pay campaign.\(^{51}\) The resultant 1913 Women's Industrial Convention illustrates the Council's ambivalence on the matter. After two rowdy meetings, it decided that in September 1913 it would convene a conference of women workers to frame definite proposals over equal pay.\(^{52}\) Hilda Moody, the Clerks' Union representative, moved that immediate steps be taken by the trade union movement to implement equal pay by establishing a standing committee, partly funded by the Trades Hall Council, to organize a "vigorous campaign".\(^{53}\) Although the delegates unanimously supported the motion, the Convention's resolutions were not implemented.\(^{54}\) Nothing resulted from the conference and yet when Lewis attended a public equal pay meeting she was censored. She complained:

> Equal pay has long been advocated by the Trades Hall Council, but they have said recently that unionists shall not stand on the same platform as political opponents to voice this general principle.\(^{55}\)

Male union delegates accepted the justice of equal pay. They were enamoured, however, of August Bebel's book, *Woman Under Socialism* and declared that no wrongs would be righted quickly. The effect of past

---

\(^{49}\) VTHC Minutes, 16 June 1910 to 20 July 1911.

\(^{50}\) Raymond, 'Labour Pains: Women in Unions', p. 46.

\(^{51}\) VTHC Minutes, 7 August 1913.

\(^{52}\) *Age*, 8 August 1913.

\(^{53}\) Minutes of the Women's Industrial Convention, convened by the VTHC, 23-25 September 1913, UOMA.

\(^{54}\) *Labor Call*, 13 November, 27 November and 4 December 1913.

\(^{55}\) ibid., 28 August 1913.
discrimination was too great and it would take time for women to become sufficiently organized.56

Mainly at the urging of its women delegates, Trades Hall Council made two short-lived attempts to organize women within its constituent unions between 1913 and 1921. In 1916, women delegates including Jean Daley and May Francis moved for a conference of union delegates to consider organizing Victorian women workers.57 The subsequent report of the Committee for Organizing Women was quietly shelved. In 1921, the executive attempted to finance women organizers again, this time at the instigation of Muriel Heagney. In November 1920, Heagney had joined the Trades Hall Council as the clerical union delegate. Three months later she proposed that a conference on the wages, conditions and organization of women workers be held.58 Again, the proposal was supported but not executed.

The major concern of the Trades Hall from 1918 was to lobby Federal Government to appoint a Royal Commission on the Basic Wage and to urge it to set a reasonable standard of living for a family of five.59 After 1918, the Trades Hall Council began to oppose equal pay. When Mr Justice Starks published a statement supporting differential rates of pay for married and single men, the Trades Hall Council recommended that all unions state that they would not accept such rulings. When the Council came to consider basic wage-fixing principles early in 1921, the motion that female employees be paid the same rates as male employees was defeated.60 That was the only occasion on which the Council as a body explicitly refused to accept the principle of equal pay. It continued to support equal pay in principle. In 1922,

57 VTHC Minutes, 17 August 1916.
58 ibid., 10 February 1921, SAU Minutes, 22 March and 28 June 1921.
59 ibid., 17 January 1918.
60 ibid., 29 July 1920 and 24 February 1921.
it appointed a standing committee to propagate the principle of equal pay for the sexes.\textsuperscript{61} It was accepted that gender-differentiated wages in commercial occupations were neither just nor strategically sensible. As one executive member stated,

so long as there is discrimination in pay between the sexes for equal work, the tendency in the commercial world will be to employ the cheaper labour, so the whole standard of the working class will be downed. Equal pay for equal work is the only safeguard for the preservation of the standard.\textsuperscript{62}

Yet the Council had great difficulty in effectively supporting the equal pay principle when some of its affiliated unions loudly proclaimed it was incompatible with the family wage.

From 1914, the Clerks' Union found it increasingly difficult to proselytize other trade unions over equal pay. It organized a petition of trade union officials to convince the Minister of Labour that all 200 Melbourne union secretaries, clerks and typists should be paid at least wages board rates in 1915.\textsuperscript{63} It convened its own trade union conference to consider the question of "equal pay for the sexes" in June 1919. The comments of Federated Clothing Union's male and female representatives were typical. At the prompting of the Clerks' Union, the Trades Hall Council submitted a new log for equal pay for males and females which the Clothing Union opposed on the grounds of "common-sense". May Francis and Herbert Carter declared that

For a young woman [clerk] to come in at 21 years of age and get £5 a week is ridiculous when we consider the members of our Union many of them working like slaves for less.\textsuperscript{64}

\textsuperscript{61} Herald, 22 December 1923.
\textsuperscript{62} ibid., 21 December 1923.
\textsuperscript{63} Later, the Clerks' Union had a bitter dispute with the Pastrycooks' Union for dismissing their female typist rather than pay the rates in the schedule adopted by the Trades Hall Council, VTHC Minutes, 30 April, 7 May, 9 and 23 July 1925.
\textsuperscript{64} Federated Clothing and Allied Trades' Union Branch Minutes, 17 March 1924, UOMA. My thanks to Raelene Francis for this reference.
The representatives were not sexist: the Clothing Union was itself seeking equal pay. It was a matter of relativities. The arbitration system pitted unions against one another.

4.3 The Victorian Clerks' Union and the equal pay campaign

The Clerks' Union's case is a good example of the strategic disadvantages of supporting equal pay early in the century. From about 1910 to the Basic Wage Decision in 1920, sections of the Victorian labour movement debated the strategy to adopt towards women in their midst. White collar Victorian employers exploited the divisions within their organized workforce. They did not simply oppose equal pay. They used the issue for all it was worth. Briefly, in 1911 the Clerks' Union had three goals it wished to achieve through arbitration. First, it wanted a minimum wage which would be a living wage comparing favourably with the wages of manual workers. Secondly, it wanted to achieve equal pay and opportunity for women. Thirdly, it aimed for a classification system that allocated margins for skill above the basic wage. For the next decade the employers played off these three union goals one against the other. In particular, employers deliberately conceded equal pay at the wages boards with every intention of appealing against their own decision. This was part of a clever strategy intended to lower the minimum rate paid to all clerks and thwart organized labour. So, three times equal pay was won in the lower tribunals and three times it was lost in the appeal court. The Victorian Court of Industrial Appeals reversed wages board equal pay decisions in 1913, 1914 and 1922. In 1917 it also refused an appeal against its 1914 decision.

The Clerks' Union's equal pay campaign resulted in the union dividing at least four ways over equal pay from 1911.65 For reasons of sexual equality,

---

65 There are two useful accounts of the 1913-14 equal pay case. Christine Macken, does not examine, however, the employers contribution to labour force divisions, in 'Exclusion or Economic Justice? Equal Pay and the Victorian Clerks' Union 1913 and
the union leaders sought equal pay. The male rank and file initially supported equal pay in the hope that employers would choose men over women. When this did not happen they abandoned claims for equal pay. One clique of women, with Labor Party and radical connections, supported the union leadership. But a second group, with conservative connections, formed a women's union which supported employers and organized against equal pay out of fear that women's jobs would be threatened were an equal pay campaign to succeed.

Union leadership and rank and file

The Clerks' Union's executive argued vigorously for equal pay for equal work from 1911 when it was first permitted access to wage tribunals. The executive were all connected with the Labor Party, with a number of their wives involved in the women's movement. Edward Chambers, for instance, the union's secretary was a bookkeeper and accountant. Chambers had cut his union teeth in lobbying the New Zealand Seddon government to legislate office hours in 1894. After shifting to Melbourne, he became a leading member of the clerks' committee in 1899 which attempted to get Parliament to limit the hours of Victorian clerks. The Clerks' Union was formed soon after and affiliated to the Trades Hall Council in 1901. Chambers was elected union secretary in 1904 and the union's Trades Hall Council representative from 1906. His family shared his concern with women workers. Both he and his


66 For example, Fred Katz was federal secretary from 1923. Both he and his wife stood for Parliament for the Labor Party and he was elected VTHC secretary in 1938. Argus, 28 May 1924 and 4 June 1938.
wife had been active in the Coburg Political Labor League.67 Their three daughters worked as clerks and became active in the union movement.68

Chambers sold equal pay to the rank and file as a first instalment. The 1912 award would be only an interim award because the union intended to go back for another bite at the cherry over classification. Increased salaries for clerks at the top of the occupation based on relativities with other occupations would be argued for once equal pay was won.

So intent on equal pay were the union leaders, that they would consider nothing else and after six months of acrimonious meetings, the wages board had reached only one decision. It had decided to reject the equal pay amendment on the casting vote of the chairman. The union executive protested that the rejection was "unjust and subversive of the right of women to a living wage" and did not solve the sweating problem.69 The chairman gladly resigned. His replacement voted with the workers' representatives on equal pay and, for the first three months in 1913, women clerks in Victoria had equal pay. Their victory was shortlived, however, for rank and file men and women turned against equal pay.

There was much questioning of the union leadership's strategy when equal pay was announced. Hours were lengthened while leave provisions were not formalized, as Vida Goldstein and Hilda Moody pointed out to the Women's Political Association members:

67 Labor Call. 20 October 1910.
68 Eileen Chambers was the VCU's typist and stenographer during World War One. Constance Chambers was a comptometer operator who sat on the Clerks' Wages Board in the 1920s. A third daughter, Mrs Williams, after leaving work to marry became an organizer of the Liquor Trades' Union.
69 Argus. 20 May 1912.
the award includes a week of 48 hours to be paid at so much an hour, whereas the actual working hours of clerks were from 39 to 41 as a rule. The status of male clerks had not been enhanced by winning equal pay. They complained that they earned a "paltry salary of 8s. a day compared to 9s. a day for an unskilled labourer". Most importantly, equal pay was widely held to have dragged down male wages. Chambers came under pressure to abandon equal pay and to concentrate on classification. The tally clerks on Melbourne wharves, for example, pressed for classification on the basis of skill and threatened to strike over their classification demand.

On the basis of women's dissatisfaction and employers' objections, the Minister of Labour referred the equal pay determination to the Court of Industrial Appeals which overturned it. When he overruled equal pay, Justice Cussen also referred the determination back to a wages board to classify "the numerous classes of clerks". The union representatives again brought equal pay onto the agenda.

The employers voluntarily voted for equal pay at the wages board hearings in 1914. They claimed that they wanted women's unfair competition stopped, a consideration they had overlooked a year previously. But the employers' representatives were relying on the union's commitment to equal pay to bring the minimum rate down. As the leader of the employers' representatives on the board explained,

The employees wanted a minimum rate of 65s. a week for clerks. We got it down to 50s. by agreeing that the rate should apply to females as well as males.

---

70 *Age*, 18 March 1913.
72 *Labor Call*, 16 January 1913.
73 *Argus*, 19 December 1912.
74 *ibid.*, 10 July and 14 October 1914.
75 *ibid.*, 10 July 1914.
The Victorian Employers’ Federation complained about the determination which its representatives had agreed to. The Federation did not reprimand its representatives, however. When it was sent to the Court of Industrial Appeals, the clerical employers were in a stronger position than if they had initially agreed to the minimum male rate of 65 shillings. The Court set the male rate at only 56 shillings, while the female rate dropped to 64% the male rate.\(^76\)

Even though equal pay was not won, young women gained most on the basis of 1911 union estimates. The Clerks’ Union estimated 14% of all metropolitan clerks earned 10 shillings or under in 1911. 25% of women earned 10 shillings or less, however, compared to 12% of male clerks. The 1914 determination set a 20 shilling minimum for typists/stenographers and 12 shillings for clerks.\(^77\)

The union, however, appealed against the decision owing to the "grossly inadequate" wages for men and women.

The controversial pre-war clerks’ decisions established the principle that differential wage rates should be paid on the basis of sex for similar work performed by male and female clerks. This was an important principle for lower white collar women workers. When women’s wages had been considered by the federal Arbitration Court in the Mildura Fruit Pickers case in 1912, the Judge stated that blacksmiths and nurses were not entitled to the same wage. He also stated that men and women should receive equal pay where they did the same work. Women should get equal pay when they worked in a 'male' occupation but a women’s wage, 54% of the male rate, when working in a 'female' occupation. In 1914, the clerical occupation was still a male dominated occupation.\(^78\)

\(^76\) Victoria Government Gazette. 105, 13 July 1914, pp. 2995-6 and 181, 10 December 1914, pp. 5591-2.
\(^77\) VCU to CIF, 11 July 1911, PRO 5466.
\(^78\) In 1937, 55% of the clerks employed were female and Mr Justice Martin declared it was essentially a female occupation, Argus, 28 June 1937.
The Mildura case was regarded as an equal pay victory by women's groups which declared that equal pay for white collar women was imminent. At the clerks' wages board hearings, Rose Lawler and Vida Goldstein submitted 108 instances covering 50 firms where women performed the same work as men, sometimes side by side with men, sometimes in place of men having displaced them. The Court decided that equal work should not be compensated with equal pay. Thereafter, moreover, female workers' proportion of the male rate was standardized. Between 1914 and 1939, Australian women's average minimum award proportion of the male rate rose from 49.3% to 53.6%. At the same time, the Victorian female clerk's proportion of the wage of the male wage fell from 64% in 1914 to 61% in 1938.

Equal pay activists lobbied against this homogenization of female labour. At the defeat of equal pay for women clerks in 1913, Ellen Mulcahy observed simply that the "determination would make clerical work a low paid female occupation" and she could have added, "like all the others". Mulcahy had appealed to women in the occupation as women of "education and refinement" to join the equal pay campaign led by the union's Women's Section. "Inexplicable" and perplexing though it seemed, the union had difficulty organizing 'lady clerks', many of whom did not seem to want equal rates of pay and opportunity with men.
Radical and conservative women unionists

The women in the union's female section belonged to the network which revolved around the Labor Party's Women's Organizing Committee and the Women's Political Association, a faction of the suffrage movement. The network had mounted a white collar equal pay campaign. Former suffrage activists, such as Vida Goldstein, started to campaign on the platform that 'we've won the constitutional right of equality (the vote) now we must win the economic right of equality (equal pay)'. There was a three-pronged campaign for equal pay in occupations in which women worked side by side with men: public servants, state teachers and commercial clerks. These women had the 'same qualifications, same ability and same responsibilities' as men.85 Public service women's wage relativity with men had fallen from the 1880s and women lobbied for the reinstatement of 1880 rates. They formed their own organizations: the Women's Postal and Telegraph Association which was led by Bertha Merrifield and Constance Berridge; the Women's Public Service Association which was led by Dora Oakley; and the Ladies Teachers' Association which was led by Clara Weekes.86 Goldstein had been instrumental in organizing a network in 1901, when she called a meeting of women civil servants employed in the Postal, Telephone, Factories and Education departments to co-ordinate their agitation.87 Margaret Cuthbertson presided and the 14 officials, including Goldstein and Weekes, continued to be the nucleus of the network. Goldstein personally attended all the sittings of the Commercial Clerks' Board on behalf of women clerks who were members of her association. Finally, the Women's Political Association invited

85 Evelyn Gough, Non-Represented...Female Labour, Melbourne, 1901.
87 Woman's Sphere, September 1901, p. 104.
delegates from all unions and women's societies and formerly initiated an equal pay for equal work campaign in September 1912.\textsuperscript{88}

The media scoffed at the equal pay activists. Ellen Mulcahy's enthusiasm for the principle of equal pay, for example, involved a "great deal of hardship to women" in order to protect men's jobs.\textsuperscript{89} The Clerks' Union's Women's Section was accused of being composed of a few "short-sighted" anti-working class feminists who were male lackeys. There was general agreement that equal pay would mean unemployment for women because they did not give work of equal value to men. In the last analysis, particularly in depressed economic conditions, employers would employ men.\textsuperscript{90}

These fears were endorsed by many women, some associated with a rival clerks' association which criticized the Clerks' Union most vehemently. This union was the Ladies Shorthand Writers' and Typistes' Association. The Ladies' Association was born out of a meeting convened by Fred Beckwith, owner and proprietor of the Centre Business College. Beckwith called the meeting after discovering that the promise of equal pay was resulting in "dozens [of women being] notified that their services would be dispensed with".\textsuperscript{91} In 1912, a similarly fearful group of women clerks pleaded not to be given equal pay. Throughout the proceedings the wages board had been lobbied by women petitioning against equal pay.

The Ladies' Association was organized by two older women, Eleanor Cameron and Beatrice Hall. Hall, president of the Association, was a well-paid stenographer earning £170 per annum which was above the award rate (£130) for males. She joined forces with Cameron. Before becoming the

\textsuperscript{88} ibid., 10 September and 9 October 1912.
\textsuperscript{89} Argus, 22 October 1912 and 4 January 1913.
\textsuperscript{90} VPD, 1903,105, p. 461, Alexander Peacock.
\textsuperscript{91} Age, 7 December 1912.
Ladies' Association's honorary secretary, Cameron had been organizing secretary of the anti-Labor Australian Women's National League. She was concerned that political and industrial unrest put a severe strain on women and believed that Australian women had to combat "State socialism" to protect the "purity of the home". In practice, this meant she wanted a separate women's clerical trade union which remained aloof from the Victoria Trades Hall Council and did not support equal pay. The Australian Women's National League declared itself to be a "non-political" body working in the interests of women and children. The League embarked on an organizing campaign in 1911 competing with the Labor Party's Women's Organizing Committee for working class women's support. Liberal agitators were described by one Organizing Committee member as being as "plentiful as rabbits" and Cameron was identified as a leading Liberal agitator. Indeed, she resigned as secretary of the League in late 1912 when she was criticized over trying to get the League to combine with the the Liberal Party. Under Cameron's direction, the Ladies' Association was affiliated to the Australian Women's National League which signalled its conservative political position.

Employers engender equal pay defeat

It was widely reported that employers were paying for the Ladies' Association rooms and its officials' expenses. Certainly, prominent businessmen supported the Ladies' Association's concerns and accompanied its representatives when they made their case to the Minister of Labour, the media and the courts. At the very least, employers' bodies openly agreed with Hall's and Cameron's two main concerns of dealing with women on the same basis as men: they opposed equal pay because they feared women would

94 Labor Call. 24 October 1912 and 17 April 1913.
loose jobs; and because they disliked the inflexibility of a proposed apprenticeship system. The Ladies' Association also argued that, under equal pay, starting salaries would be too low as women started older than men and that clerical women's starting age was older than most other women's who worked in domestic and manufacturing workers.95

The employers' opposition was successful. The Clerks' Union's executive stepped back from equal pay. The union began defining both the basic rate and margins for skill on the basis of gender. It backed down from its unequivocal position that typists, stenographers, and clerks - male and female - should be paid the same basic salary. The union's 1914 scale of wages proposed lower rates for typists and stenographers than the lowest grade of male clerical work. Justice Cussen disagreed, believing the skills of a typist and stenographer were more demanding. The union abandoned equal pay for typists in the hope that it could win equal pay for female clerks. When seeking equal wage increases for 1700 temporarily employed Commonwealth clerks in 1915, it deliberately excluded typists. It argued that employers could easily establish in the arbitration forums that typists performed separate duties in a female occupation which would weaken the overall claim.

Concentrating on classification and a higher minimum wage, however, proved no more successful. In October 1918, the union came to an agreement with the employers that, in return for immediate wage increases, it would not pursue classification or equal pay. In 1920, a limited classification was conceded but at the expense of what the union regarded as the need to win concessions for the "unskilled" clerks. Even then, the classification it won

95 Argus. 21 January 1913. The only exception from the age criterion in the award was for women starting over 21 with less than six months' experience and the infirm. Age. 18 December 1912.
was abandoned by the courts at the employers' insistence in 1922.96 A living wage, equal pay and classification were, then, arbitration footballs for ten years. Most importantly, disagreement between workers, both male and female, and employers was crucial to the defeat of equal pay for women clerks which the Clerks' Union's executive pursued assiduously.

By the 1920s, State and Commonwealth arbitration judges uniformly supported the family wage.97 Out of court, employer after employer considered and formally rejected equal pay, even where women did the same work, and instead granted bonuses to married men. There were official reports on pay for Victorian women teachers, bank clerks and public servants.98 Like other equal pay reports, that on Commonwealth public servants, countered the wage principle of 'value of the work performed' used by "insistent" equal pay campaigners with the requirement to provide for families.99 In 1923, the Public Service Commissioner granted a bonus of £20 to married men on salaries below £264 and formally abandoned equal pay which had existed on paper since 1901. The Commissioner announced that despite the equal pay campaign he had bowed to the "universal principle ... to discriminate" announcing he could not accept the principle of equal pay "even when the work is the same".100

96 Argus, 1 July 1922.
97 Manny Geztler carefully examines the criteria used in determining wages in the federal Arbitration Court in 'An Historical Examination and Analysis of the Evolution and Development of the Principles and Practices of Wage Fixation for Adult Females in the Federal Jurisdiction' unpublished LLM, By-Law thesis, University of Sydney, 1971. She characterizes the period 1919-1931 as the "heyday of the needs doctrine" when the predominant consideration was the "typical male" and "typical female" wage needs. After 1931, the capacity of the industry to pay became important.
100 Sun, 21 December 1923.
After the 1920 federal basic wage decision, equal pay was no longer the bargaining tool it had been for the Clerks' Union. The decision signalled the end of the earliest equal pay campaign. Justice McArthur made this clear when he disallowed the equal pay provision in the commercial clerks' determination in 1922. Equal pay had been debated for some years but the family wage "view had prevailed and it was settled that the basic rate ought to be [the family wage]." 101 In 1924, the Clerks' Union obtained only 60% of the male rate for women from the wages board. The union was not to win a victory in the battle for wage equity until 1936 when it sought to have women paid 80% of the male rate and the wages board awarded them 75%. But even this victory was soon overturned for the Court of Industrial Appeals lowered the women's rate to 60% again in 1937. The contrast between the acrimonious early wages board hearings and the 1936 decision was marked. In 1936, the determination was reached in "record time, only two meetings being necessary to complete it". 102 Women were not organized in a separate section.

Divisions among the participants in the Clerks' Union over equal pay, then, cannot be reduced to a simple gender division. Equal pay was regarded contemporaneously by many office workers, male and female, as a class issue and an obstacle to raising the standard of living of family units. The clerks' cases up to the 1920s were remarkable in that they involved women organizing for and against equal pay. The broader women's movement was also split over the issue. The clerks' defeat contributed to the demise of the wider equal pay campaign.

102 Argus, 10 January and 28 August 1936.
4.4 Family wage decision and women’s organizational divisions

The early equal pay campaign is absent from the historiography. It is usually argued that women had relatively weak industrial bargaining power and were neglected by mainstream trade unionism. A relatively high proportion of women did work through trade unions and outside the movement in Victoria for equal pay, however, before the 1920s. The equal pay campaign begun before World War One started to lose its direction by the 1920s. The women activists and trade unionists attempted to reconcile class and gender justices but failed. The potentially fruitful union of women working in feminizing white-collar occupations and the general women’s movement over equal pay stalled and wider social and political organization fractured.

The rise and fall of the equal pay campaign coincided with a rise and decline in women’s representation on the Trades Hall Council. The number of women delegates to the Council peaked during World War One at about 10% of delegates. It then dropped to about 5% of delegates and the organizational support for women’s union sections collapsed. Union amalgamations after the war had detrimental effects for women’s sections. The formerly vocal Women’s Postal and Telegraph Association and the Women’s Section of the Clerks’ Union were dissolved in the interests of bigger unions. In 1921, shop assistants terminated the appointment of their “lady” organizer, Mrs Wilson Forbes. The President of the Shop Assistants’ Union began advising against the sectionalism of women’s branches. The Trades Hall Council called for the male and female

103 VTHC Minutes, 11 September 1919, six women out of 107 delegates represented 6%. In January 1918, for example, there were five women delegates attending VTHC meetings with Sarah Lewis on the executive: Miss Lewis, Female Hotel and Caterers; Miss Francis, Clothing Workers; Miss Felstead, Women Bookbinders; Miss Bond, Tobacco Workers; Miss Smith, VCU.


105 SAU Minutes, 8 March 1921.

106 Shop Assistant, 20 July 1927.
sections of the Confectioners' Union to amalgamate. A Female Confectioners' Union had been formed in 1917 to demand a living wage and equal pay for women. Calls for the amalgamation of the gender-based unions were more insistent after the female unionists sided with employers against the immediate implementation of an award increasing wages. The women's union supported a post-Christmas implementation date to avoid the possibility of women being laid off. A January date was at expense of storemen's pre-Christmas wage increases.

Women unionists representing 13 unions formed the Woman's Trade Union League in August 1925 with its first aim to "obtain for girls and women equal opportunities with boys and men in trades and technical training, and pay on the basis of occupation and not sex". It was not until 1936, however, that such initiatives put equal pay back onto the the Victorian Trades Hall Council's agenda. In the meantime, the women who had been prominent in the early equal pay cases went off in different directions.

The defeats of equal pay for the clerks, teachers and public servants from 1914 led to the disillusionment of some of the women activists who abandoned their former political allies. Some members of the Women's Political Association activists were bitterly disappointment at what they regarded as the Victorian Liberal Party's abandonment of equal pay. During the debates on equal pay for women teachers, the Premier, Sir Alexander Peacock, renounced his predecessor's commitment to equal pay for equal work. He stated the position clearly when he opposed equal pay being included in wages board legislation in July 1914. Equal pay would be "injurious to women" and female labour was not to be encouraged. The

107 Argus. 11 August 1925.
Liberal party did not want female public service clerks or factory workers; it wanted them "to become mothers". Fathers should be able to provide for their dependent families. Hilda Moody attempted to get the Women's Political Association to affiliate to the Labor Party which was supporting equal pay in Parliament. The executive led by Vida Goldstein, however, refused to 'politicize' the movement. She argued that it's strength had been it's "non-party" status. It meant to pursue the same tactics for equal pay as it had employed for the suffrage. The Association abandoned equal pay in 1914 and for the duration of the war. In 1914, it supported a teachers' claim for four-fifths of the male wage. It did not support the issue during the war. Some members joined organizations, such as the Women's Social and Political Union formed in 1915, to agitate specifically for equal pay for equal work. The Women's Political Association itself collapsed in 1920.

The Labor Party's Women's Organizing Committee survived the war and the adverse equal pay judgments but not unchanged. Its pre-war industrial organizing initiative was not sustained. The Organizing Committee itself was in recess from 1913 until 1918. It lost some support. Ellen Mulcahy, who worked so closely on the union's equal pay case, took the most extreme action. She had been secretary of the Labor Party's Women's Organizing Committee and founded and led a branch of the Political Labor League. She abandoned women's union sections and the Labor Party to establish a multi-occupational Women's Industrial Association, a gender-based syndicalist union. When the Organizing Committee was reformed, it did not regain its close relationship with the Trades Hall Council. Some women on the executive, such as Muriel Heagney, Mrs A. Katz and Jean Daley, continued

110 *Woman Voter* 18 August and 27 July 1914.
111 ibid., 30 June 1914.
112 ibid., 9 December 1915.
113 *Argus*, 15 September 1913, women bookbinders, clerks, waitresses, office cleaners, tailoresses and laundry workers were represented.
to advocate equal pay through female unionism; that "women should learn the value of combinations, a lesson which men had learned through militarism". The Organizing Committee convened a report on "equal pay for the sexes" in 1922. In 1923, Heagney was researcher for the Clothing Trades' equal pay case. Increasingly, however, trade union women in the Organizing Committee concerned themselves with motherhood, industrial health issues, and child endowment.

Equal pay activists had always been concerned with family survival. The Clerks' Union's most vocal women advocates for equal pay, for instance, had agreed that there were "biological laws" which resulted in most working women being young, single women who would leave the workforce when they married. Equal pay would mean that women would no longer be used to undercut the minimum wage of men who had wives and children to support. Even if equal pay were won, these women believed there would still be inequities in the wage system. Heagney pointed these out in the women's column she wrote with Rose Smith in the Clerks' Union's journal. A radical reassessment of the method of fixing the basic wage was due. A wage set for a married man, a woman and two children was not appropriate for either a single man or woman. Nor was it appropriate for a family with six or seven children or for a woman with dependants. Such concerns about families' survival were increased at the end of the war.

Heagney represented the clerks' federal organization, which met the Minister of Labour in 1920 to plead that he call a commercial clerks wages board together to raise the minimum rate:

114 ibid., 28 May 1924.
115 ibid., 7 April 1919 and 16 April 1923. VTHC Minutes, 24 August 1922 and 9 July 1925.
116 Labor Call, 5 May and 8 September 1910, 19 December 1912.
117 Clerk, 7 June 1918.
At the present rate families were barely on the bread line owing to the tremendous increase in the cost of food. Indeed, a wage of £3/10/- just covered the cost of housing and food. Clerks receiving £3/2/- down to £2/15/- were in an appalling state.¹¹⁸

She was employed as researcher in 1919 and 1920 for the Federated Unions, a predecessor of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, to help prepare its case for the Royal Commission on the Basic Wage. Heagney had to examine family budgets and from that time, she began to consider the plight of the "ordinary working man's wife". A. B. Piddington described the plight of this woman after listening to Basic Wage Commission evidence:

... she never has any domestic assistance; she can only snatch a very short interval of repose after childbirth-an interval often made so short that she suffers all her life from the after-effects-and the round of duty goes on day after day and week after week with very little variation and no holidays...¹¹⁹

Piddington had advocated family endowment. A Maternity Allowance, or one-off £5 'baby bonus' had been introduced by the federal government in 1912. By contrast, family endowment would be a regular weekly income. When discussing family endowment, Heagney and Daley argued that the basic wage set by the Arbitration Court and wages board rates were barely sufficient for "a man and his wife" and took no account of children. Women were resorting to abortion for they could not afford children.¹²⁰ The wives of Commonwealth public servants and banks clerks were privileged for they had child endowment schemes from 1920 and 1926, respectively. Heagney and Daley wanted these privileges extended to the entire workforce.

After the war, women trade union activists began to reconcile their equal pay demands with their support for the maintenance of the working class family's

¹¹⁸ 'Notes of a deputation from the Australian Clerical Association which waited upon the Hon. the Minister of Labour on Wednesday, the 22nd September, 1920', PRO 5466/42.
¹²⁰ ibid., clauses 22767-22786, Jean Daley.
If equal pay was to be fair, child endowment or social welfare measures such as a maternity allowance had to be won first. In March 1923, Heagney and Daley organized a women's conference on the question of a maternity allowance, the All Australian Women's Conference on the Maternity Bonus. They were prominent in the two Labor Party committees on child endowment from 1923 as well as presenting the Women's Organizing Committee's case to the Royal Commission on Child Endowment hearings in 1928.

The failed equal pay campaign had a significant effect, then, on the women's movement. It was not simply the case that women did not improve their position. When women began to work through male-dominated unions as they did over equal pay, they lost the momentum and the networks that had been the foundation and the strength of the Victorian suffrage movement. The women's movement activists tended to move in two directions after the earliest equal pay campaign: feminists supporting equality; and feminists supporting equal pay as well as state intervention with policies which assisted families. The Women's Central Committee of the Labor Party, for instance, belongs in the latter category. It supported the employment of women for only 30 hours a week in factories as well as 'equal pay for the sexes'. Similarly, on the basis of their experience with working women, Clerks' Union women activists began to align themselves with families' welfare. The pre-1922 movement fragmented and changed direction.

---

121 See Jenny Bremner who argues that there was no need to reconcile these principles in 'In the Cause of Equality', in Margaret Bevege, Margaret James and Carmel Shute, *Worth Her Salt*, Sydney, 1982, pp. 295-298. For a discussion on the conflict of justices contained in the 'Basic Wage' and 'Equal Pay', see Merrawan Scowcroft, 'Concepts of Social Justice in the Equal Pay Debates', unpublished BA (Hons) thesis, ANU, 1982, particularly pp. 1-20.


123 Muriel Heagney, 'Labor Women's Contribution to Human Welfare'.

124 VTHC Minutes, 11 and 18 January 1923, 5 April 1923.

125 Divisions continued in the 1930s between the United Associations of Women and the Council of Action for Equal Pay. See Patricia Ranald, 'Feminism and Class: A Study of
4.5 Conclusion: Union and division among workers

Early attempts to win equal pay have been dismissed as "unsuccessful, peripheral and minor". Historians have ignored the pre-1937 equal pay campaign. To some extent, the Clerks' Union was a special case. It was conspicuous amongst the Victorian Trades Hall Council unions in advocating equal pay. The case study of the clerks has not been used to prove that some male trade unionists were not so bad after all, however. The importance of the Clerks' Union case study lies in what it reveals of the structural and organizational divisions within the workforce. I want to draw two conclusions from the union's experience, then.

First, sex did not predict position over equal pay. It was not the clear-cut case of sexism such as many accounts would have us believe. Equal pay was integral to the Victorian Clerks' Union's executive's strategy. Seemingly against its own interest, the male leadership of the Clerks' Union continued to argue for equal pay. Usually the failure of the trade union movement to adopt a concerted equal pay strategy is said to have weakened trade unionist and working class militancy. In the Victorian clerks' case, adopting equal pay proved expensive for the union, fracturing its unity and sabotaging its other industrial aims. Feminists today judging trade unions and the arbitration forums at the turn of the century can easily point to injustices done to women. The Clerks' Union shows a union executive taking the 'correct' position on equal pay and failing in its objective. It failed not only because the employers turned the campaign for equal pay to their own advantage, but because equal pay was perceived as unjust to working class families even by its potential women supporters.

---

127 See the judgement on 'the large class of female employees opposed to the increase', *Argus*, 11 March 1913.
Secondly, not all groups of women in the Victorian labour market shared the same interests. Older, privileged, public sector women organized in order to protect their positions and to win equal pay. They found many women working in the private sector did not support them. Some of these women, many of whom were young, organized against equal pay because they believed their cheaper wages protected their jobs and their future married lives.

The widely-held belief that employers would employ men in preference to women if they had to pay the same wages was proved wrong in the clerks' case, however. As business college proprietor, Sidney Stott, assured an audience of 700 students and their families in 1913, the "wholesale dismissal theory was merely a bogey". Men would not replace women: "they were in the position to know at the present time male typists were almost unobtainable".128 Women clerks in the twentieth century were more than an easily manipulated reserve army of labour which could be used to substitute for male labour periodically.

---

128 ibid., 16 December 1912.
The Reserve Army of Labour

18. 'A New Problem for Parents of Girls', 1916
This influx of women workers into offices brought with it a good deal of economic insecurity to the male clerks. The employment of women was gradual, but as the typewriter gained ground more girls were being taken into offices than boys, and it was only natural for the male clerks to form the opinion that the influx of women would in the end imperil the employment of boys in offices.

The Clerk, 7/6, October-November 1952, p. 2, P. J. Clarey, former Secretary VCU.
A New Problem for Parents of Girls

arises out of the fact that, with war draining the country of its young men, the girls' natural future of marriage and domesticity is much less assured.

It becomes, therefore, a wise provision to equip her with the means of earning a livelihood and of enjoying a useful, interesting career.

Send Your Daughter to Stott's

Let her here acquire the means of business training and knowledge essential to a good position, and she will be secure against any vicissitude which may arise.

Stott's is the oldest established of Australia's Business Colleges. It maintains a staff of twenty expert tutors, and in premises, equipment, and methods takes rank as first of all Commercial Colleges in this country.

Stott's Business College,
96-100 RUSSELL ST., MELBOURNE.
So one day a paper came to the house offering 8 full and 16 half scholarships to this Bradshaw's Business College. Mum never even knew I was going to sit for the Exam. There were 5 big halls full in the City, and when I saw so many going [I] nearly turned home again. But it was to my advantage to be young and just leaving school, most were 16 or so and had been out a while, maybe I was more on the ball with the basic subjects... I obtained a half, and Mum actually struggled to pay off the other half on 10 shillings a week. Seems unbelievable now.
Elsie Blacklead, (pseudonym), Work History, paid employment from 1926.

[Stott’s Business College, 1935] We were taught typing, shorthand and bookkeeping. The noise in the typing room was deafening as about 70 Underwood manual typewriters sounded off at once... we acquired rhythm by belting out 'now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party' to the tune of the National Emblem March on a gramophone. It took a full year to acquire an accurate speed of 55 words per minute.
Rose Sorrel, (pseudonym), Work History, paid employment from 1936.

20. Girls At Work and Play, 1925
Thanks to the foresight of its first Headmaster, Mr. John Braithwaite, this School has been the pioneer of commercial education among secondary schools in Victoria, and it has a well-considered and thorough course, its work on this side reaching the standard of Intermediate Accountancy, combined with Leaving Certificate Honours, and this year it has been engaged in training teachers for commercial work in other high schools. But at any time during the past five years the School could easily have been filled by pupils anxious to learn typewriting, or typewriting and shorthand, and it is amazing, and somewhat disappointing, to find how many people believe that these two subjects, with perhaps a smattering of business practice thrown in, comprise the whole of a commercial education, and also to find how many are prepared to pay a higher fee for a short course in these subjects. Fortunately, the School has never been able (nor did it wish) to cater to these people. The result has been that those who have chosen our course... have graduated from the School with a sound commercial education......
The Essendon High School Magazine, 1920, pp. 4-5.
21. **Boys Typing, Stott and Hoare's Business College, 1907**
The introduction of the typewriter caused a revolution in regard to correspondency, invoicing and many other normal practices and procedures in offices... a legion of business colleges sprang up, at which boys and girls from 14 years of age onward would be taught typewriting, shorthand and bookkeeping at so much a quarter.

*The Clerk, 7/6, October-November 1952, p. 2, P. J. Clarey, former Secretary VCU.*

---

22. **Colesanco, Special Study Number, June 1928.**
In the first year of the Commerce Course there were six full-time school leavers....The whole Commerce Course was designed to meet the needs of the older students- some quite elderly-who were in employment. I would guess there were over 200 enrolments and for the new university subjects of Economic Geography, Economic History, Banking Currency and Exchange we had to be accommodated in the Public Lecture Theatre. The lectures were held either between 1 and 2 pm or after 5 at night... As all my subjects in the 3rd year could be done in the evening I took a job as a bookkeeper.

Harriet Amies, first woman to graduate in commerce from the Melbourne University, *Work History*, paid employment from 1928.
Chapter Five:
Reshaping The Reserve Army of Shop and Office Labour
Around World War One

...every public school of any size now teaches shorthand and typewriting (shorthand up to 80 words per minute) as part of their regular routine...There are many thousands now being trained in the public schools... in shorthand and typewriting without any charge whatever, and it is a wonder that we get any students at all.1

5.1 Reserve Army of Shop and Office Labour

Wars and economic depressions are usually associated with the use of the reserve army of female labour.2 The use of the reserve army of middle class female labour in white collar jobs from World War One is an example which is often cited. During the First World War, as a result of male enlistments in the armed forces, Melbourne banks, for instance, first employed women in significant numbers. Most of the positions were not advertised; the young women recruited were the relatives and friends of existing staff. They had to be over 18 and, whatever their bank duties, they were required to be able to type. They were paid half the male rate.3 From a mere dozen women in 1914, the proportion of female bank staff peaked at about 30% in 1918. Most were laid off after the war but some remained. In the interwar period, Melbourne banks employed no more than 10% women.4 So, some men came home from war to find their billets filled by women.5 Were the banks representative of women's and men's experience in shop and office

---

1 Zercho's Outward Letterbook, 14 August 1921, F. Chartres, Stott's business college manager, Sydney, to F. W. Zercho, business college proprietor, Melbourne, Zercho's Collection, University of Melbourne Archives (UOMA).
2 For examples of comments about female shop and office workers supplanting men, see Argus, 18 January 1916 and 13 February 1931. For the British experience, see, for example, Gregory Anderson, ed., The White-Blouse Revolution: Female office workers since 1870, Manchester and New York, 1988, pp. 11-13.
4 For example, 281 State Bank of Victoria men enlisted during the war from a staff numbering 537 in August 1914. 157 women were temporarily employed, 31 were retained on permanent staff in 1918. In 1927, there were 96 women out of 1161 staff. State Bank of Victoria, Annual Report, 1918 and Staff Remuneration and Classification Report, 1927.
employment during the war and in the interwar period? In this chapter, I will address the question of the reserve army of labour and attempt to clarify the sense in which women were a reserve army of shop and office labour. I will also ask if men suffered as a consequence.

The reserve army of labour was a term used by Marx to refer to those workers, like women, whom capital used to bring labour costs down and to undermine older, skilled, male labour. He argued that a prerequisite for the development of wealth in a capitalist society was a disposable surplus of workers, or an industrial reserve army of labour, which alternately expanded and contracted according to business cycles. Capitalists determined the type of workers recruited by modifying their labour demands 'downwards' as the process of accumulation and mechanization in their sector accelerated. Sector by sector, expensive labour would be replaced by a greater number of cheaper workers:

skilled labourers by less skilled, mature labour-power by immature, male by female, that of adults by that of young persons or children.

Marx envisaged, then, that in a time of business boom, such as occurred during World War One, older, skilled males would be replaced by younger, unskilled youths and women who came from working class backgrounds.

Marx identified three forms of the reserve army of labour: floating, latent and stagnant. The floating reservists usually moved in and out of employment according to their life cycle. Thus, capitalists often preferred young boys who were dismissed as they grew older. The latent reservists were rural labourers who were rendered redundant by the agricultural revolution and who, therefore, sought employment in urban industry. They were lured to cities by subsistence wages offered by employers. Finally, the stagnant

---

7 ibid., p. 635.
reservists came from natural urban population growth (the poor had the largest families) or from those who been dismissed from jobs which were being restructured or mechanized. They had to compete for irregular employment in jobs with long hours and below-subsistence wages, particularly in the "domestic industry".

The reservoir of women in unpaid domestic labour has been considered analogous to rural labour. Most shop and office historians have regarded women as a floating reserve army of labour in war or, over the twentieth century, as a latent reserve army of labour. Marxists, such as Braverman, argue that women have become wage labourers because of two economic processes. First, capitalism has subordinated domestic labour to production. Instead of being social production and consumption sites, families have become simply sites of consumption. Housewives' domestic industry is no longer valuable and they have become wage labourers. Secondly, commodity production has usurped small farm production, which was often women's work, through mass production. Braverman sees the new female clerical, sales and services employees as having essentially the same backgrounds as factory workers. Feminist historians, such as Margery Davis, have also identified the process which drew women out of the home as the mass production of consumer goods which rendered girls' domestic labour redundant. It is argued, however, that white collar female recruits before 1930 came from backgrounds quite different from those of factory workers. They were 'white, native-born, middle class' single girls who had stayed at school at least until they were 16 and who continued to live with their families while they worked. They were educated girls from better-off families.

---

9 ibid., pp. 350-56.
Australian commentators are agreed that a new source of middle class labour was being tapped by Victorian white collar employers, although they disagree over the source of this reserve army. Explanations range from middle class fertility and leisure patterns to capitalist development and the impact of the war. As early as 1912, the media was observing that the 'modern girl' working in a Melbourne office was

one of a small family where one woman is quite sufficient to do all the work. In these circumstances the girl who stays at home usually gets into lazy habits and is discontented. Her school or college life has not prepared her for settling down quietly at home...\(^{11}\)

Contemporaries such as Mrs Angela Booth, a middle-class Australian Women's National League activist living in Melbourne, noted that the character of home-life was so modified in this way [by mass-produced commodities] that it changed from various and satisfying activity to a condition of monopoly and idleness, and so we find the girls of the middle classes gradually being drawn out into the world of labour.\(^{12}\)

William Sinclair gives more prominence to the catalytic effect of the war. The expanding clerical-service sector drew upon a new source of young, educated, middle class women "who had previously not been prepared to go out to work". In the 1880s, young, middle class, Melbourne women contributed to their families by childcare and and domestic services rather than by earning money. From 1900 to 1910, while the size of families had decreased, schooling monopolized the girls' new freedom. It was World War One which enticed these educated, middle class girls into the white collar workforce. It was just as well that the clerical-service sector was expanding because the "increased provision of secondary and tertiary education facilities for women" was fuelling a large middle class supply.\(^{13}\)

\(^{11}\) Age. 10 August 1912.


A middle class source of supply for clerical jobs was not new. Middle class women had been going into "nursing, teaching and typing" jobs since the late nineteenth century.14 There were two changes, however, in recruitment which lie outside Marxist and feminist versions of the reserve army of labour.

First, shop and office recruitment was becoming more heterogeneous. This occurred because state education gradually became the training place for the majority of recruits. The few facilities training business girls before 1910 were business colleges and private schools which charged fees. By the turn of the century, Methodist Ladies' College with a largely middle class roll, for example, had included "business knowledge" and shorthand and typing in its curriculum. Thereafter, however, while secondary schooling was still for those in higher socio-economic backgrounds, education to 14 and commercial training in state schools became more general. In prewar Melbourne, as the cost of typewriters came down, it was becoming possible to learn typing cheaply.

Braverman's and Davis' versions of the reserve army of female labour are not incompatible if we accept that the social origins of shop and office workers were becoming more heterogeneous. Before World War One, the reservoir of shop and office labour was a smaller, more elite group of women than after. Mechanisms, particularly educational, were instituted about the time of the war which were to give more girls the qualifications to become business girls. In effect, the potential reserve army of shop and office labour was expanding as post-primary education expanded. It was some time before all working class females had a secondary school education. By the same token, it was some time before all middle class secondary educated girls went out to work. The war had little to do with these longer term processes.

14 Edna Ryan and Anne Conlon, Gentle Invaders, Sydney, 1974, p. 15.
Secondly, while the supply of young women was rising, the age structure of commerce was changing. The proportion of young women was growing while that of older women was declining. In 1921, the proportion of women in commerce aged 15 to 24 was 52% compared to 42% in 1911 and 32% in 1901. The opposite was occurring amongst men, though less markedly. In 1921, the proportion of males in commerce aged over 45 had grown from 24%, in 1901, to 28%, in 1911 and 31%, in 1921. Contrary to the usual ideas of the one-way reserve army of labour, where the tendency for younger unskilled females to replace older skilled males is supposedly marked, the pattern appears more complicated in shop and office employment. Younger skilled females could become more typical at the expense of older females, and younger male workers could become less typical than older skilled males. The rising proportion of older males contradicts the view that young women displaced older skilled males.

Educational developments, it will be argued, go some way to explaining both the more heterogeneous background of women shop and office workers and the inter-gender age patterns. Before examining educational developments, however, the question of the temporary wartime use of the reserve army of female labour to replace male labour in Victorian shop and office work needs to be resolved.

5.2 Temporary Wartime Exigency?

One would assume that all shop and office employers had a labour supply problem during World War One. 39% of Victoria's males aged 18 to 44, or 112399, enlisted in the armed forces between 1914 and 1918. White collar workers were not under-represented: clerical workers comprised 7.4% of the total Australian Infantry Forces' enlistments at a time when they made
up about 5% of the male workforce. One could further assume, reasonably, that employers filled the vacant jobs with women. The statistics suggest that in most cases these young women did not vacate their jobs when the soldiers returned. Women's shop and office employment grew from 7073 to 16707 between 1911 and 1921. Indeed, with the exception of the 1880s, the decade in which the largest increase in women shop and office workers before 1939 was 1911 to 1921. I argue, however, that women did not take men's jobs as a result of World War One. The war played little part in women's increasing shop and office employment.

Public Sector

The war had little impact on government employment of women. The Australian Governments did not organize the labour market or, in particular, direct women into essential services. The question of co-ordinating or facilitating the process whereby women filled men's jobs was not even raised in Victoria until halfway through the war in September 1916 when Victorian enlistments exceeded 64000. Even then, the government decided to do nothing. Four major British reports on women's employment during and immediately after the war were presented to the Victorian Parliament. The Victorian Trades Hall Council called on the government in 1921 to appoint a royal commission to investigate all aspects of women working in Victoria during and since the war. The Minister of Labour maintained, however, the British reports had been necessary because British factory

15 C. E. W. Bean, ed., The Official History of Australia in the War, 1914-1918, 11, Ernest Scott, Australia During the War, Sydney, 1936, p. 874.
16 Argus. 20 September 1916. The British Government called on women willing to perform men’s work to register at labour exchanges; 33000 responded within two weeks although only 5000 got jobs through the labour exchanges.
17 Report of the Board of Trade on increased employment in the United Kingdom with statistics up to April 1918; Women in Industry Report of (Imperial) War Cabinet Committee; Women's Advisory (Imperial) Committee Report of Sub-committee appointed to consider position after the War of women holding temporary appointment in Government Departments; Women's Employment (Imperial) Committee.
legislation could not be compared to that of Victoria.\textsuperscript{18} He contended it was not necessary for the Victorian government to concern itself with the wartime effects on working women.

The establishment of the Australian Women's Employment Bureau during World War Two contrasts with a hands-off response during World War One. There are obvious differences in government involvement in the two wars. The deployment of labour to the defence forces was not so great during World War One as it was to be in World War Two. The armed forces comprised 0.5% of the workforce in 1914 rising to a peak of 9.8% in 1918 compared to 0.4% in 1939 rising to a peak of 21.8% in 1944.\textsuperscript{19}

The First World War, moreover, was characterized by an absence of munitions production. The comparison with Britain is clear. It has been estimated that as a result of the war, 105000 female positions had been created by the British Government by 1919 while the formation of the Ministry of Munitions in 1915 generated a 65000 staff bureaucracy, many of whom were women.\textsuperscript{20} By contrast, in Australia the Defence Department established seven factories, five of which were in Victoria: a leather goods factory at Clifton Hill from September 1911; a clothing factory at South Melbourne from January 1912 and a woollen clothing factory at Geelong; a cordite factory at Maribyrnong; and an artificial limbs factory at Caulfield during the war. In 1917 only 50% of the 1217 employees were women. This level of industrial production did not require a massive bureaucracy.

\textsuperscript{18} Argus, 4 and 28 April and 7 June 1921.


Some women clerks were employed by the State during the war. Non-permanent government employment, however, was not merely related to wartime or to women as shown in Graph 5-1.

The Victorian public service used comparatively little temporary clerical staff during the war. Permanent clerical labour in the state sector showed little fluctuation from 1890. Indeed, rather than laying off staff during the 1890s depression, public service commissioner's reports make clear that reductions were achieved through resignations, retirements and non-recruitment. Less recourse was made to temporary staff during the 1890s depression and World War One. Temporary employment in the state clerical division was greater either side of the war, 1910 to 1914 and 1918 to 1924.

Graph 5-1 shows only those temporary staff who were employed for 150 or more days in the public service. The number of those employed less than 150 days almost equalled permanent employees. In 1921, for example, 3264
temporary employees were recorded compared to 3919 permanent employees. During the war, public servants, including temporary public servants, were mostly male. The Commonwealth Government employed 6000 temporary staff, 1700 of them in Melbourne mainly in the Defence Department and in the preparation of the census. Muriel Heagney was paid equal pay as a Defence Department correspondence clerk in 1917 because no provision had been made for the employment of women.21

The war did not signal the end of an era for men. Rather than employing young women or even young men, the government chose to give preference to ex-soldiers in the interwar period in the few positions vacant in the public services. There was no recruitment during the depression, from 1929 to 1933. In 1930, the Victorian public service was desperately short of labour and seconded 309 excess railway officers: 125 went into the Taxation Office. Similarly, the Commonwealth Public Service Board began to realize the consequences of recruiting only returned servicemen in the postwar period followed by zero recruitment during the depression. There was a dearth of well-educated youth from whom executives ought to have been selected.22

Private Sector

Commerce expanded during the war decade. While retail prices doubled between 1910 and 1921, particularly immediately after the war, retail sales more than doubled from 1910 to 1921.23 A small number of shops were conspicuous in breaking records in concentrations of labour. The growth in staff of the Myer Emporium was marked: its staff numbered 300 in 1914, 1000 by the end of the war and 2000 by 1926. 12% of the total increase in retail

21 Muriel Heagney, Biography, unpublished paper, Muriel Heagney Papers, State Library of Victoria (SLV), MS 9106 1/45/1 (a).
labour in Victoria in these years can be accounted for by Myer's expansion. According to Marx, these were good conditions in which employers could replace male for female labour.

Women's employment was not simply at the expense of male labour in the private sector during the war or in its aftermath. Sex segregation limited the amount of direct substitution which occurred. Business expansion saw the employment, moreover, of both women and men.

First, despite shortages, segregation was modified but not dissolved during the war. 56 members of Dalgety's Melbourne office clerical/enlisted from its 15 departments fairly evenly while women's employment was restricted to specific areas.24 Similarly, the 157 women employed by the State Bank in Victoria did not completely stop the gap created by 281 men enlisting. Instead, bank officers were required to work a great deal of overtime as a result. The Clerks' Union raised the issue of bank officers' lack of lunchbreaks and consistent night and weekend overtime with bank representatives from 1915.25 The women retained on the permanent staff after the war were concentrated in certain areas.

Secondly, there was a long term trend of labour expansion which was not broken by the war. The obvious problem with associating the war with the activation of the reserve army of female labour is that women's shop and office employment expanded rapidly before 1914. The expansion of women's shop and office employment throughout the twentieth century was not punctuated by peaks and troughs but maintained a remarkably consistent increase. The trend was not created by the war although it did accelerate during the war. The trend of female employment, however, was even from 1915 when the

24 Dalgety Records, Victorian branch, Archives of Business and Labour (ABL), 100/1/25/1.
25 See, for example, Argus, 17 September and Age, 24 and 27 September 1915.
Chief Inspector began collecting data on employment in retail shops, as Table 5-1 indicates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Drapery M</th>
<th>Drapery F</th>
<th>Bread &amp; Grocers M</th>
<th>Bread &amp; Grocers F</th>
<th>Confectionery M</th>
<th>Confectionery F</th>
<th>Total M</th>
<th>Total F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>2391</td>
<td>3695</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>615</td>
<td>2668</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>17628</td>
<td>7734</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1916</td>
<td>2281</td>
<td>3969</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>689</td>
<td>2570</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>17168</td>
<td>8573</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>2384</td>
<td>4298</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>889</td>
<td>2564</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>17178</td>
<td>9617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1918</td>
<td>2455</td>
<td>4485</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>849</td>
<td>2796</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>17629</td>
<td>9891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1919</td>
<td>2807</td>
<td>4580</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>1059</td>
<td>2859</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>18002</td>
<td>10515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>2555</td>
<td>5084</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>1071</td>
<td>3089</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>19612</td>
<td>11511</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>2335</td>
<td>4858</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>1523</td>
<td>2983</td>
<td>216</td>
<td>19178</td>
<td>11732</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>2425</td>
<td>4747</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>1167</td>
<td>2345</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>15262</td>
<td>10755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>3046</td>
<td>6835</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>1503</td>
<td>3616</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>22692</td>
<td>15933</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>4301</td>
<td>8944</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>2102</td>
<td>3892</td>
<td>315</td>
<td>26759</td>
<td>21826</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data further demonstrates the parallel trends in male and female employment, although women's employment expanded at a greater rate than males. There was no significant decrease in male labour in retailing during the war years or afterwards.

Larger joint stock drapery and departmental retailing expanded the corporate employment of both men and women. The separation of ownership and management was promoted by the formation of joint stock companies. There are early examples of company registration: the Mutual Store registered as a proprietary company in 1872 and Mark Foy registered in Sydney in 1909. A movement began during World War One, however: Myer registered in 1917 to finance expansion and re-registered thereafter as it grew. A cornerstone of its success was developing from private ownership to a limited liability and then a public incorporated company. Buckley and Nunn registered in 1919; G. J. Coles and Robertson and Mullens in 1921; Marcus Clark (Victoria) in 1923; Leviathan in 1926; Cox Brothers in 1928; Foy and Gibson and

26 Chief Inspector of Factories and Shops Reports, (CIFRs), 1915-1939, Victorian Parliamentary Papers (VPP).
Edments in 1936; George and George in 1937. The expansion of proprietary companies was a boom for prospective male directors and executives. There were few women managers or directors of the new registered companies.27

Men were not sacked so as to facilitate women's employment in private sector office employment either from 1914. Clerical employment expanded and employers required male and female employees. Clerical employers were resorting to a greater use of women and temporary clerical labour from the 1910s. These were not necessarily the same. There were temporary male and female workers. Firms such as Goldsborough, Mort and Company had employed temporary staff up to the early 1890s—six, or a tenth of its staff of 53, in 1893. Temporary staff were not employed again until expansion during World War One. In January 1918, there were 37 permanent wool department and administrative staff and, in addition, eight temporary staff, or nearly a fifth of its staff. Five women were among 15 temporary clerical workers in November 1919, seven women out of 16 in January 1920 and five women out of 12 in September 1922. 28 The women were all correspondence clerks or machine operators.

Banking illustrates both the segregated nature of women's employment and the lack of detrimental effects it had on the conditions of male employment as banking expanded. Banking underwent rapid expansion in the second decade of the twentieth century. The State Bank of Victoria opened 13 new

---

27 There are only a few examples of female directors. Miss I. Goodwin, a director on the Bright and Hitchcocks board, was sister of the managing director. Edith Burnside, a director on the W. K. Burnside Pty. Ltd. board, was married to William Burnside. Effie Ball, a director on the Ball and Welch board, was Charles and Tabitha Ball's daughter. Alice Archer, director of H. Larcher and Co., was married to Horatio Larcher. Who’s Who in the World of Women, Melbourne, 1934.

28 Goldsborough, Mort and Company, Registers of Officers Books, 1888-1928, and List of temporary clerks and typists together with Juniors, at present employed but not entered in Register of Staff, 10 November 1919, 1 January 1920, 14 September 1922, ABL, 2A/1.
branches in 1914 and 1915. Most dramatically, the Commonwealth Government decided to establish itself as a savings bank in 1911 with its own agents, having hitherto used the Post Office branches as agencies. 103 branches were established under managers and 319 contracts were made with agents. The number of branches increased to 129 in 1916 and 144 in 1921 at the same time that agency work increased. Bank branch growth was accompanied by a decrease in the ratio of staff per branch. Between 1914 and 1922, for example, the number of staff per branch in the National Bank of Australasia in Victoria dropped from 7.98 to 5.6 and rose thereafter. Cheap female labour should have been attractive to banking.

Women's employment was restricted, however. Bankers used the same arguments against women's employment as had been used by feminizing shop and office employers in the 1880s: women liked routine work and were liable to break down under stress. Women were initially strictly segregated from male workers. Above all else, the segregated expansion during the war and in its aftermath meant that women primarily competed with women for jobs. Take, for example, the women employed by the National Bank of Australasia, Victoria, as shown in Table 5-2.

Table 5-2: Sexual Division, National Bank of Australasia, Victorian Branches, 1922-39

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Women</th>
<th>Total Staff</th>
<th>Proportion Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1922</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>752</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1924</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>772</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>793</td>
<td>8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1926</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>828</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>855</td>
<td>7.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1928</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>836</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1929</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>794</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>794</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931-32</td>
<td>no figures</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

29 Inspector-General's Report on Classification, 7 June 1921, State Bank of Victoria Archives, General Manager, series 641.1.
Women did not endanger male salaries, even male supernumeraries' salaries either, as Graph 5-2 indicates for the Bank of Australasia. Indeed, male bank officers' salaries improved rather than declined. 31

Labour diversified around the war. This was not detrimental to men in general. In particular, women's employment did not undermine men's employment or salaries. The bank example of women taking men's jobs is not all it seems to be, then.

---

5.3 The State Making Clerks

While the number of males did not decrease, the competition for jobs was hotting up for both males and females. Those involved in education observed that the war was not a time of suspending operations:

the war has brought not stagnation, nor even a period of lessened activity but a time of intense growth, calling for every resource in intelligence and energy to meet the rapidly changing conditions... if there ever was a time when...young people needed training...-that time is now.32

In Victoria, as education historians have pointed out for other regions, from about 1910 there was a two-fold education debate over how to design the curriculum. At issue was how competition for white collar jobs could be reduced and whether secondary school curriculum should be the same for girls and boys.33 State provision of education did not result in a democratization of business education or rapid social mobility. It served to reinforce the difference between those with the qualifications and those without them. It served also to distinguish between the skills male and female recruits obtained prior to employment. The reserve army of shop and office labour was enlarged and reshaped through educational facilities; firstly, by increasing the numbers of those with post-primary education and, secondly, by teaching some girls typing.

Commerce in Secondary Schools

Frank Tate, the Director of Education and architect of secondary education in Victoria, was quite clear that the 1910 Act establishing high schools would not mean that the state was in the business of making clerks or increasing occupational mobility.34 He maintained that public secondary schooling

32 Argus. 22 January 1918, see also 18 January 1916.
34 Elementary schools had established continuation classes for students over 12, the Melbourne Continuation School was established in 1905 and two agricultural colleges soon after. In 1909, there were 672 Continuation School pupils (about a third became
will not tend to still further increase the aspirants to clerical occupations, nor will it add recruits to the "black coat brigade". 35

The Education Act of 1910 aimed to increase retention by obliging pupils to remain at school until they were 14 or until they had received the Merit Certificate which could be gained when they were as young as 13. Previously school pupils could leave as soon as the Exemption or Qualifying Certificate was obtained—usually at 12 but sometimes as young as 10. After 1910, the Merit Certificate entitled pupils to attend the new secondary school facilities, Higher Elementary, District High, and Junior Technical Schools.

Figure 5-1: School Structure Under the 1910 Victorian Education Act 36

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEAVING CERTIFICATE (18y)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PROFICIENCY CERTIFICATE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MERIT CERTIFICATE (14y)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuation School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary School, 12-14+ years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERMEDIATE CERTIFICATE (16y)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trade School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evening Classes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERMEDIATE CERTIFICATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Junior Technical Schools:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Industrial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Prep. Professional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Domestic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Commercial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Agricultural</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERMEDIATE CERTIFICATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Higher Elementary School, 12-16 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUALIFYING CERTIFICATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>District High School, 12-18 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Elementary School, 4.5-12 years

---

35 Director of Education, Preliminary Report of the Director of Education upon Observations made during an Official Visit to Europe and America in 1907; With Recommendations referring to State Education in Victoria, p. 4, VPP, 1909.

As Figure 5-1 shows, Tate's complicated system was designed to raise the educational training of people in every sector of the whole economy: farming, clerking, industrial, professional and domestic.37

The passing of education acts Australian-wide did not result in any large jump in retention in the highest classes. In 1910, only a minority of the population had gone beyond primary school to achieve the standards of junior public or intermediate certificate or the higher matriculation or leaving certificate. These qualifications were required for good shop and clerical positions. The 1901 Statistical Register records 4899 Victorian males and 4076 females aged 13 and upwards enrolled in secondary schools or colleges. That is, 6.4% and 6.5%, respectively, of all males and females aged 13 to 17 years old. In 1911, the figure had risen to 31% and 32%.38 That figure overstates the increase for the pattern was that most children left at 13 or 14 years old. The 1911 census shows that while 83% of girls and 85% of boys aged 13 were engaged in full-time education, the figure dropped to 44% of girls and 42% of boys aged 14, 20% of girls and 18% of boys aged 15 and only 12% of girls and 10% boys aged 16.39

Access to free education at 14 was new. The private sector had already established post-primary schools for those whose parents could afford the fees. Higher Elementary Schools did not charge fees whilst other state

---

38 The official Victorian figures do not make it easy to calculate the trend by proportion of the population attending secondary schools. The age distribution of the population is not given by years but age groups in the census from 1921 while the ages of school pupils are given in age groups up to 13 and up to 14 in the departmental and census records respectively. Even the Education Department's Chief Executive only estimated the number of young people attending secondary schools in 1906 as 7%. 17% of those over 13 were attending school, a technical institute and the university in 1921. On the basis of proportional rise of 23% for 15-19 year olds between 1921 and 1933, 26% of 13-17 years old were in school in 1933. Compare this with the higher estimates given by Leonard Broom and F. Lancaster Jones, Opportunity and Attainment in Australia, Canberra, 1976, p. 11.
39 Statistical Register of Victoria, 1911- Population.
schools charged fees to those over 14. The fee was £6 per annum, although the Minister could remit the fees for those parents with an income below £150 per annum. State secondary education overtook private secondary education by the early twenties. In 1918, there were 28 District High Schools, 19 Higher Elementary Schools and 18 Junior High Schools with a roll of 8635 secondary students compared to 499 registered schools (including business colleges) with 13696 over 14 enrolled. By 1922, the State rolls of pupils over 14 years old—at elementary, intermediate and secondary schools (excluding technical ones)—were 23136 compared with 12202 at registered schools. As higher elementary schools made up 57% of State secondary enrolments by 1922 this meant most of the state education was free.

Despite Tate's hopes for a highly trained commercial workforce, schools failed to institute highly specialized vocational training. The Victorian Education Department set out a curriculum for high school commerce subjects in 1910 and 1913. By 1913, Essendon was the only school offering the full commercial course while 11 other schools offered individual subjects. There were more teachers after the war. Between 1920 and 1927 commercial teachers were trained at Essendon. By this time the Commerce Faculty at the University of Melbourne had been founded.

While the number of commercial teachers and typewriters in schools increased, most of Essendon High Schools pupils left with general qualifications and perhaps one year of commercial subjects. Although Essendon High School ex-pupils only made up 3% of pupils leaving State secondary schools between 1935 and 1939, a disproportionate number went directly into commercial jobs or training. Essendon High School exit data shows the immediate occupational destination for just over 1000 pupils

---

40 *Argus*, 4 October 1913.
between 1935 and 1939. It reveals that 31% of boys and 49% of girls went directly into commercial employment. Most students left at 14—the Merit Certificate level, 30 to 40% completed Intermediate Certificate level and only 10% of students took the course to Leaving Certificate level. Even Essendon High School's commercial course was not very specialized, however. The school prospectus offered a uniform course for 12 to 14 year olds and then two specialist courses, professional and commercial. The streaming of pupils into professional or commercial courses was introduced in 1913. The professional stream was for those wanting to enter teaching, university, the public service or who wanted "a good general education". The commercial stream was for those wanting jobs in commerce. First year commercial students spent a third of their schooltime on commercial subjects: two periods of commercial correspondence, four periods of bookkeeping and five periods of shorthand typing. By their third year, students spent half of their school course studying commercial subjects: the number of periods spent on commercial subjects had risen to three, four and nine respectively. One-third of the student body or 163 students were leaving with some qualification by 1922, 20% had obtained the Intermediate Certificate in commerce. The Education Department instituted "9th year courses" devoted to speed practice in shorthand and typing in 1921. Only those who had achieved the intermediate certificate or higher standard could take the one year course in commercial work at Essendon, however. Most commercial students spent most of their schooltime on general curricula subjects, then.

---

41 Essendon High School Exit Data, 1935-39: 3% went onto higher education, 2% into the public services, 4% into industry, 1% into home duties, 21% to other education, 6% miscellaneous and 25% did not notify the school of their employment. This last proportion is higher than the official statistics which are given in Table 5-3.

42 Essendon Higher Elementary School Prospectus, Melbourne, 1912. Streaming was continued until 1960. Few Essendon High School pupils prepared for university. In 1934 the Education Department stopped leaving Honours classes and students who wished to continue had to transfer to University or Melbourne High School. University orientated classes were not reinstated until 1954.


45 ibid., 1920, pp. 4-5.
The Education Department was producing 14 year old, secondary school educated clerks. As Table 5-3 indicates, an increasing proportion of secondary school students went directly into commercial jobs or business colleges; 20% in 1923 and 30% by 1939. There were complaints about this trend. Victoria needed "farmers not clerks" and youths should not be encouraged to train for genteel jobs.46

Table 5-3: Official Statistics on the Destination of State Secondary Schools Pupils by %, Victoria, 1923-1939

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1923</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>19.5</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>29.5</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>5209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1925</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>5924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>7016</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1930</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>3859</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>31.6</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>10095</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>9042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1937</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>9824</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1939</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>29.9</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>10728</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are examples of employers instituting educational training programmes. Sidney Myer and Edwin Lee Neil had instituted a 'training scheme' which involved new recruits being tutored by another staff member according to management instructions in 1914.48 This was simply the business norm. Myer established a Training Department, however, with Miss Sara Richardson teaching shorthand and typing in 1927. This soon developed into a "School for Salesmanship".49 It was modelled on overseas precedents. Myer's classes were compulsory for juniors but voluntary for seniors. A shop assistant's level of school education determined the type of training the

---

46 Argus, 26 May 1913.
49 Florence Christian, 'Education in Retail Stores', unpublished BEd thesis, University of Melbourne, 1944. Christian was Superintendent of the Myer Staff Training.
person received. The type of person recruited and their educational attainment was becoming more heterogeneous. Fifteen year olds had three hour classes a week in working hours for three years.

Young people who come to us with higher qualifications than the Proficiency Certificate are given intensive training. For those with Leaving Certificate, more work of a still higher standard is required, for these young people are generally groomed for taking responsibility sooner than others.50

The public sector institutes had a longer genesis. The Post and Telegraph Department established and suspended formal staff telegraphic classes from 1892 until 1907. At that time the Postmaster-General's Department established a library for its employees. In 1910, the Sydney office inaugurated a series of lectures for "senior telegraphers in the higher branches of telegraphy". The Department of Trade and Commerce established a "school of training" for its junior boys in Victoria.51 Out of these initiatives grew the Post Office and Railway Institutes. In 1918, an officer was appointed to co-ordinate the establishment of in-service training of all public service staff.

Myer and the public service were among the few Melbourne employers in the interwar period who instituted staff training. Only the large Sydney stores, David Jones, Farmers, Anthony Horderns and Mark Foys established similar departments to Myer's by 1939.52 Most employers did not develop training programmes. They were content to rely on the general education system as a number made clear in response to a questionnaire the Melbourne Chamber of Commerce circulated in the 1930s. 96 firms, mostly the largest ones,

52 Mantons and Mutual Stores had training programmes during the war and G. J. Coles issued books, such as *The Coles Girl*, c. 1920.
responded and 90% agreed that state schools should teach a liberal course for commercial studies, though 40% suggested that specialist commercial courses could be introduced in the last two years of schooling.\(^{53}\) It was generally accepted that "[f]rom a commercial point of view, all that a school can teach a boy is how to learn".\(^{54}\) Tate himself acknowledged a broad education in English was the "chief need in business".\(^{55}\)

Many of the personalized entrance exams which had flourished at the end of the nineteenth century were abandoned as state secondary schooling expanded. The Commonwealth Public Service, for example, found it was having trouble filling junior clerkships with "suitable candidates". The entrance exams were only periodic and involved study outside school programmes. In 1918, the Acting Commissioner made a commitment to emulate the New South Wales and Queensland state public services’ recent experiment to use junior public exams as a basis for entrance into the Commonwealth service as soon as its commitment to employ returned servicemen was met.\(^{56}\) Even fewer candidates sat the state entrance exams. In 1916, for example, 600 to 700 Victorian candidates sat the federal clerical exams in March and October, and only 79 and 58 sat the state clerical exams in April and November.\(^{57}\)

The Victorian Royal Commission on the public service sitting in 1916 had already considered this matter.\(^{58}\) The 1883 Act had provided for two sets of


\(^{54}\) Argus, 16 December 1927.

\(^{55}\) ibid., 2 July 1930.


exams, an entrance exam and a more difficult exam which was a prerequisite for promotion. In 1904 the exam for promotion, which was only nominal anyway, was dispensed with. Frank Tate, the Director of Education and President of the Council for Public Education, believed that more able boys of 16 were concentrating on junior public exams and the boys applying for the public service were average students who left school at 14 and then attended special coaching classes to sit a far-too easy examination. Tate suggested that the qualifying exam for the public service should be the junior public exam which would mean a larger and a better group of candidates to choose from. The Commission duly recommended that the entrance exam prescribed by regulation for admission to the clerical division be the university-coordinated Intermediate Exam which had replaced the Junior Public Exam. To emphasize his point, Tate organized a deputation of the Council of Public Education over which he presided together with the Chief Inspectors of Schools and Secondary Schools to interview and persuade the Public Service Commissioner to implement the scheme. He was successful.

Headmasters found it increasingly easier to place those with better educational qualifications in white collar jobs. As one headmaster observed:

This year I had far more applicants for boys of advanced type than I could meet. But I find considerable difficulty in placing boys of 15 who had asked me to find them posts, in some cases without having even gained their intermediate certificate.

In November 1921, the headmasters of the associated schools met Melbourne Chamber of Commerce representatives to persuade them to agree to provide superior jobs for boys up to the age of 18 years who had "good educational qualifications". Superior jobs were simply jobs which meant that they did not start on the bottom rung of the ladder.

60 Argus, 20 December 1927.
61 ibid., 17 December 1917.
The number of people with post-primary education was growing. During the depression this caused public concern: an Educational Board of Inquiry in 1931 was worried about the 'politically dangerous' situation of frustrated, over-educated men:

In 1905 about 5 per cent of the school population over twelve years of age was receiving some form of secondary education. To-day the number must be between 10 and 15 per cent. at least. But of the whole school population it is doubtful whether 1/2 per cent. (Burt says 1/10 per cent.) are fitted for higher professional work and 3 to 5 per cent. for lower professional work. We are overcrowding the "black coated" professions and occupations, and are fast reaching a position similar to that in the United States of America, where such advertisements as "Wanted Grocer's Assistants, Messenger & c., High School graduate" are common.62

By 1937, however, school principals were sending circulars to parents whose children's results indicated that they could pass intermediate or leaving certificates to implore they stay longer.

For anything better than the routine typing positions, advanced general qualifications are demanded for employment in the Public Service, Banks, Insurance Companies and the large Business Houses.63

The Education Department, then, attempted to introduce a complicated vocational educational system for trades and industry and a high school system for professionals in 1910, but the general high school experience predominated. Most students chose between a professional or commercial course, but the commercial course was a general course. Schools failed to institute highly specialized vocational training. Business was content to employ students on the basis of a general secondary school education. There was a growing commercial reserve army of educated labour.

62 Reports (Interim and Final) of the Board of Inquiry into Certain Matters Concerning the Education Department. 1931, p. 17, VPP. 1931.
63 W. Richards, Williamstown School Headmaster, cited by Florence Baxter, 'An Investigation of Commercial Education as provided by a High School in a Metropolitan Industrial Area and By a High School in a Country District-The Course Provided, the Demand for and Effectiveness of the Course- Suggested Lines of Future Development', unpublished BEd Investigation, University of Melbourne, 1937, p. 10.
Gender-differentiated Education

Frank Tate was more prophetic when he declared, in a paper he delivered to the National Council of Women in 1908, that there was a need for gender-differentiated education:

It was no argument to say that women had demonstrated that they could do mental work of which men were capable. The question was rather Ought they to do it?"\(^{64}\)

There was a significant change in the Education Department's policy to girls' education during the war; from a policy of equality to one of differentiation. In 1923, the Council of Public Education made a further policy statement on women's education in an addendum to its 1918 report which was symptomatic of the changed educational philosophy on girls' education.\(^{65}\) It quoted at length from the English Board of Education's report on the "Differentiation of Curriculum Between the Sexes in Secondary Schools". That latter report had sought to undermine what it regarded as the unfortunate success of the women's movement for higher education. The movement had sought to make girls' education the equal of boys'. The development of girls' schools on the "older boys' school" model was regarded as unsuitable by the English Board of Education for the majority of girls were destined for lowly wage earning and domestic employments. The English Board regarded the move from the pre-1860 system of educating an elite of girls in accomplishments to mass education as laudable. It considered undue strain was put on girls, however, who were studying the same curriculum and sitting the same exams as boys sometimes under male teachers. The Victorian report echoed these sentiments and also emphasized emotively the dangers of the loss of aesthetic taste by newly educated girls: "the woman is the real home maker" and education should be designed to "make her sensitive to the beautiful". Such sentiments by educationalists were in keeping with a general concern

\(^{64}\) Argus. 8 October 1908.

with women's domestic role which was evident in most other areas of public policy in Victoria from the war.

One can follow the world-wide debate over girls' education in the Australasian Medical Congress sessions. There was much criticism of the "sacrificing of girls in order that they might become typists". The evil effects of study on girls' eyesight, menstrual regularity and nervous systems was talked about at conference after conference. From 1900, eugenicists led by Frederic Truby King wanted education diverted from training girls for "independence and self-support" to training them for marriage and motherhood. Stanley Hall, Galton, G. K. Chesterton and Herbert Spencer led the same cry overseas. In Australia, eugenicists were opposed within the medical profession by people, such as Dr Mary de Garis of Tilooburra, who objected to sacrificing a women's education for domestic science training. The National Council of Women was also opposed to 12 year old girls being trained in "such laborious work as washing, scrubbing". Similarly, the Woman's Political Association characterized domestic training of 12 year old girls as another "attempt on the part of men to degrade women to the domestic sphere".

The Victorian Education Minister supported domestic education on the grounds that the range of employment was widened for girls who took specialized domestic science courses. By that he meant they could become domestic servants instead of shop assistants or factory workers. Much has

66 For comment on the wider debate, see Carol Dyhouse, Towards a 'Feminine' Curriculum for English Schoolgirls: The Demands of Ideology 1870-1963, Women's Studies International Quarterly, 1, 1978, pp. 291-311.
67 Australasian Medical Congress, Transactions: Intercolonial Medical Congress, Session 5, Brisbane, 1900 to Eleventh Session, Sydney, 1912.
68 Frederic Truby King, The Evils of Cram, Dunedin, 1906.
69 Woman Voter, 9 March 1915.
70 Argus, 18 November 1914.
71 ibid., 30 August 1915.
been written about the social efficiency movement's attempt to make young women into housewives and mothers. The theory is clear that girls inculcated with a duty to marry and mother had little inclination to prepare for the job market. Girls did prepare for the job market, however, and schools played a more direct role in girls' transition between home and the commercial workplace than is usually recognized. Indeed, I argue that more Melbourne girls were directly assisted into commercial jobs by the education system than they were made proficient in domestic arts. Domestic arts supporters had to contend with parents' wishes and the very slow establishment of domestic training facilities in schools.

First, educationalists complained that even when domestic training facilities were provided, parents had little desire to see their daughters enter domestic service until they were married:

while girls would enter the commercial classes by the score, it was only with the greatest difficulty that he could get together a small class for the study of domestic science... most parents preferred to sacrifice their daughters' training for callings in which they could begin earning their living as soon as possible by becoming proficient in shorthand and typewriting and similar subjects, rather than have them devote a portion of their time to domestic science and subjects connected with the making of a home.72

Girls preferred becoming "commercial flappers" and they did not want to be taught only domestic skills.

Girls' enthusiasm for commercial education had a material basis. There was a monetary incentive for young women who intended leaving waged work in their mid-20s, upon marriage to become typists in the meantime. In 1921 the starting wage of a 16 year old female Melbourne typist was 22/6, that of a female clerk 17/6 and that of a female drapery assistant 15 shillings. (A male clerk at 16 earned 17/6 and a male drapery assistant earned 16/6).

72 Australasian Medical Congress, Transactions, Tenth Session, Auckland, 1914, pp. 86, ff.
Thereafter, the differential among women closed. A 20 year old typist recruited at 16 earned 45 shillings a clerk 40 shillings and a drapery assistant 35 shillings. After 23 a female typist, clerk and drapery assistant all earned 50 shillings. Indeed, even then the Chief Inspector of Factories argued that the prospects for young women over 20 starting employment were grim. They either did not get jobs or were offered part-time rather than full employment. The wages board rates encouraged employers to employ younger women from about 1910. It had been the practice in draperies, for example, to employ girls of about twenty in preference to younger girls. But in 1909, the Drapers Board set rates on the basis of age instead of experience:

It can be readily understood that when a Board prescribes that a woman, merely because she is 23 years of age must be paid 27s.6d. per week, although she may have had no experience whatsoever in the trade—is merely another way of saying that such a person shall not be employed in that particular trade.

There were monetary incentives and imperatives, then, for young women entering the workforce for they entered the workforce young or not at all.

These decisions were made within a family decision making process. A survey showed that 80% of the decisions to take commerce were made by families "generally" with the mutual agreement of the children themselves. Many Essendon High School students, for example, came from lower middle-class backgrounds. Exit data for Essendon High School shows that one-third of those leaving for commercial or business college came from families with a breadwinner employed in commerce and 21% had professional and managerial breadwinners. Significantly, however, a third came from what could be described as working class backgrounds—16% came from families with unskilled breadwinners— while another 17% came from families with skilled manual and construction breadwinners. These families had to pay
Essendon High School's £6 annual fee, in addition to one-off payments; in 1916, these included £2 for books, five shillings for school cap or colours in addition to the uniform, and 7/6 or five shillings, respectively for boys and girls sports and games. Families were prepared to invest in their daughters' as well as their sons' workforce training.

Secondly, secondary schools were not very successful in teaching girls domestic skills. More woodwork was taught to boys than domestic science was taught to girls. The first Domestic Arts School was opened only in 1914. In 1916, the National Council of Women pointed out that in Victoria last year there were 30000 more women than men. There were 132 marriageable females to every 100 marriageable males. The best means of fitting girls for the industrial world was by technical education. There were 15000 girls 14 years of age leaving school every year, but of the £73000 voted for technical education there was only a little over £900 for domestic economy—less than 2/- per head.

In 1918 the College of Domestic Economy had 57 full-time students, in addition to which there were five Schools of Domestic Arts for 12 to 14 year old girls and 59 cookery centres mostly in provincial centres. There were 86 woodwork centres providing for 9532 boys and 70 cookery centres providing for 4123 girls by June 1939. Between 1927 and 1934, the proportion of gross post-primary enrolments at domestic arts schools in Victoria hovered around 10%. Girls could still take commercial subjects at Schools of Domestic Arts. Indeed, the MacPherson College of Domestic Arts introduced commercial classes in the 1920s.

---

77 Argus, 15 April 1914, 28 August 1915. The first cookery centre was opened in South Carlton in April 1897. Education Report of the Minister of Public Instruction, 1899-1900, Appendix E, 'Report on Cookery' by Mrs. A. Fawcett Story, Lecturer and Organizer, pp. 78-79, VPP, 1899-1900, 3.
78 Argus, 27 July 1916.
79 Education Report of the Minister of Public Instruction, 1918-19, pp. 13-14, VPP, 1919, 2.
80 V.Y.B., 1939-40, p. 220.
81 Education Report of the Minister of Public Instruction, 1927-1939, VPP, 1928-1940. See in particular, 1925-6, 'Report on Domestic Arts' by Flora Pell, Supervisor of Domestic Schools, pp. 36-37, VPP, 1927, 2.
Commercial employment among secondary school girls kept growing despite the criticism of girls' intellectual education, the eugenics movement and the postwar 'back-to-the-home' movement. Commercial education, however, was sexually-oriented. The sexual division of commercial education was the foundation for the sexual division of commercial employment.

The Minister of Education requested the Council on Public Education to appoint a Committee on Commercial Education in 1916. The Council was an advisory body made up of representatives of the Education Department, Registered Schools—including business colleges, Melbourne University and Technical institutions— and industrial interests. The committee consulted the 'mercantile community' which agreed to promote a scheme of higher vocational training in the state system and promised financial assistance to that end. The committee stated that

the aim of the school should not be the mere production of typists or stenographers but to provide such a training for boys and girls of commercial bent as to qualify them to take their place in the future in developing our commercial relations with the rest of the world.

This stirring goal was contradicted by the Eighth Report of the Council on Public Education the next year. Girls' education was to be the same as boys' up to the age of 14 except that girls were to have more physical education and less homework because they had home duties to perform after school. Training or employment in work unrelated to the home was now publicly considered a "positive disadvantage" for girls. At the same time it was noted that girls did work before marriage. In particular, the report claimed that the war had resulted in a growing number of girls being employed in "banks,

---

82 The Committee met with representatives from the Melbourne Chamber of Commerce, the Victorian Chamber of Manufacturers, Bankers' Institute of Australasia, Incorporated Institute of Accountants, Australasian Corporation of Public Accountants and the University of Melbourne.
offices and the Public Service". It was predicted that this would continue after the war:

The difficulties with respect to the low payment and slow promotion of the rank and file when men only were employed is likely to be overcome when fewer males are engaged for the junior positions, and the large majority of the girls on marrying automatically leave the service.

The Council recommended to Parliament that commercial classes should set lower standards of numerical and clerical competence for girls. Inferior education for girls was portrayed as following social reality—giving girls an education appropriate to their position—not as creating it:

Almost the whole of the girls engaged in commercial work are engaged on comparatively simple tasks. These girls need no elaborate commercial education. A good knowledge of English, especially composition and spelling, an accurate knowledge of arithmetic and some knowledge of technology of particular work they may be called upon to do, are absolutely necessary. 84

The direction of the general school course tailored girls for commercial employment in routine jobs.

Gender differences in state-educated clerks were clearly developing. Boys were not taught typing. They were taught bookkeeping and economics. There was also public educational provision for an elite of males destined to become "captains" of commerce and administration. The increasing emphasis of specific commercial education for girls who were destined to perform routine tasks reflected the developing division of labour in shops and offices.

A study of metropolitan and country high school pupils aged 13 to 16 showed that two-thirds of the metropolitan girls took the commercial courses while two-thirds of the metropolitan boys took the professional courses. In 1934 to 1937, 61%, 73%, 69% and 68% of the girls and only 37%, 38%, 27% and 84 Eighth Report of the Council on Public Education, 1917-18, p. 6, VPP, 1918, 2.
21% of the boys took commercial courses. 85 There was a gender difference even amongst those taking commerce: boys tended to go directly into commerce while girls went to business college. That boys did not go onto business college from secondary schools is borne out by the Victoria-wide returns. In 1937, for example, only 60 boys out of 1263 going into commerce went to business college whereas 655 girls out of 1548 leaving to commerce went to business college. 86

Was the developing reserve army of female labour an uneducated, poorly-trained group? Business employers were recruiting more women but they had not dropped the recruitment criteria that they had had in the 1880s of some secondary education. Big stores' policy of choosing girls did not change. Mr G. McQuie, personnel manager of G. J. Coles', stated that his firm's longstanding policy had been to prefer salesgirls with a merit certificate, for a "definite standard of intelligence is required". Because secondary schools were producing greater numbers of suitably qualified women, Coles was increasingly able to insist on its preference. The possession of middle-class appearance, a friendly manner, neat appearance, and the ability to speak well were the other employment criteria. 87 The Myer Emporium ran after-hour induction courses on 'personal appearance, speech, habits and manners'. The standards remained. State provision of free education to 14 year olds was significant, then. The number of girls with post-primary education and school qualifications required for department store retailing and clerical work probably doubled between 1911 and 1921, from a tenth to a fifth of all 14 to 15 year olds and continued to grow. 88

85 Baxter, 'Commercial Education', pp. 5-6, ff.
86 Education Report of the Minister of Public Instruction, 1937-8, p. 8, VPP. 1939.
87 Women's World, July 1934.
88 See footnote 38.
There appears to have been increased competition among women. While there were complaints of a postwar scarcity of women factory workers, all literary evidence points to an oversupply of potential shop and office women. Office positions were described by employment brokers as "very scarce", the demand for girl clerks "was much smaller than the supply". One city retailer received over 50 applications a day for female shop assistants' situations in the interwar period. From 1918, the press reported that working girls wished "to be typists or clerks, and next to that they like[d] to serve behind counters"; they did not want to be domestic servants or factory workers though clearly, most women were. Competition increased. The criteria upon which Alice Anderson was employed as a clerk in the Caulfield Town clerks' office at the rate of 30 shillings a week was that she had attended Merton Hall and obtained/junior public (university) certificate. Anderson fits the profile of commercial women in the 1880s. By the interwar period, there was also a demand for female routine copyists. The heterogeneity of educational credentials and the widening of female socio-economic recruitment is also evident from the history of business colleges.

5.4 Business Colleges Educating Business Girls

The unions complained bitterly about business colleges casting adrift hordes of unskilled, poorly-trained, young girls, "irrespective of demand" onto the Melbourne labour market from 1910. Reserve army of labour proponents would predict such a development.

Melbourne's business colleges were selective before 1910. They charged nearly three times the fees that State High Schools were to charge. Bradshaw's charged £25 (including stationery) for an annual course, for

90 *Argus*, 27 September 1919.
91 For example: *Clerk*, 30 April, 31 May, 29 June 1912; *Truth*, 24 August 1912; *Age*, 4 December 1912.
instance, and Zercho's Business College charged £15/15/-.

They were quite explicit about the type of young woman they recruited and what jobs business college graduates would obtain. Their advertisements proclaimed that "Lady Stenographers" got all the "best appointments".

Every educated young lady who takes up the course of Instruction is sure to get an appointment. Educated Young Ladies only are admitted as Students at Zercho's.

Young ladies wanting admission to Zercho's "must have matriculated" or have had a "good primary education". An entrance fee of 2/6 was charged for scholarship candidates whom Stott and Hoare advised were those who are good at Handwriting and have reached the Matriculation or Junior Public standard in English, Composition or Junior Public Standard in English, Composition and Arithmetic.

It gleefully announced that girls like Amy Somerville, a South Melbourne College student, received an appointment at an "influential Melbourne House" on a commencing salary of £1 per week after 5 months' tuition on scholarship.

Business colleges were the main providers of young women clerical recruits in prewar Victoria. They operated as clerical employment agencies and the majority of recruits sought by business increasingly were girls. In 1910, the number of positions offered by employers to Zercho's pupils was only slightly more for girls than boys, 165 compared to 133. Zercho's filled half the positions offered to it; 75% of the girls' positions but only 25% of the boys'. After 1910, however, the proportion of girls sought for jobs through Zercho's rose. Zercho's student body changed in tune with this demand. By 1921, 1112 women were enrolled and only 93 males, that is a 92% female day

92 Age, 12 December 1912.
94 Age, 3 December 1906.
95 Punch, 4 April 1907.
96 Argus, 11 July 1908.
97 Age, 8 June 1907.
school population. Certainly the students were mostly young girls. Frederick Zercho taught only ten married women in the interwar period. As he explained to a Sydney colleague, Zercho discriminated not only in favour of young females but also, it would appear, against short women:

Wages Boards conditions are responsible to a certain extent in an age limit for our new full day pupils, for instance, we will not accept responsibility in the placing of youths over 16 years of age. It is also very difficult to place a lady over 19 years of age in her first position after undergoing a full business course. They are also harder to get up to the standard and if slow and dull they cause discontent among other students. I have, therefore, been discriminating for some time now. Another thing, we have only about four girls in the whole day school under 4 feet 10 inches high. That is our minimum.

During the war, the business colleges had mounted a campaign trying to channel the reserve army of girls through its doors. They ran big headlines "Your Daughter Should Be Capable of Earning a Livelihood". Stott declared

The girlhood of this country ...must regard the war from two broad aspects—the one in which duty and opportunity are strangely mingled, the other that of sheer necessity...it becomes every girl's duty to herself to become self-supporting and capable of earning her own livelihood.

The business colleges declared that after the war the skilled girls would be kept on.

In the efficient organized business world of to-morrow it is a safe prophecy that she will in many spheres replace the male worker, who will be reserved for the more arduous tasks, physical and mental.

The business college enrollments went up.

---

98 By 1921, the two largest Melbourne business were advertising that they placed 2500 and 3000 people, mainly women, annually in positions in a labour market. This was Australian-wide, however. By 1914, other schools were feminizing. The Commercial School at the Workingmen's College had 75% female by 1914. Stephen Murray-Smith and Anthony John Dare, The Tech: A Centenary History of Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Melbourne, 1987, pp. 138 and 207-09.

99 Zercho's Outward Letter Book, Zercho to F. A. Chartres, 8 March 1922.

100 Spectator, 26 May 1916.

101 Herald, 17 December 1915.

102 Punch, 4 January 1917.
Two developments transformed the nature of business college education of girls which affect any judgement of their relation to the reserve army of labour. First, the business colleges began to lose their pre-eminent position in providing business education to secondary schools, particularly state secondary schools. Secondly, the business colleges began to pitch their services to a different group of women than before the war.

Between 1907 and 1914, the number of Melbourne business colleges doubled from seven to 15 but then remained static. The number of female clerks was rising constantly but the business colleges' contribution to the clerical supply started falling, particularly from about 1922. In advertisements, the two largest business colleges, Stott and Hoare's and Zercho's, claimed to have been offered positions by employers for 1587 clerks in 1914 for a Melbourne labour force estimated to be about 5000.103 Zercho's employment books show a doubling of positions offered and positions filled between 1910 and 1920 from 511 to 1274. March 1912 marked an upturn in female positions when 120 girl graduates were sought compared with a monthly average of 28 in the previous 26 months. A high point was reached in 1920 when 1274 female positions were offered to Zercho's students. Only 239 positions were offered in 1931. The 1920 record was not exceeded in the interwar period: 1100 students were offered positions in the late thirties.104

The business colleges tried to become "finishing schools". Zercho struck a deal with the Essendon headmaster to find jobs for his students in return for recommendations to Essendon students to go to Zercho's. In 1921, Essendon High School had 30 typewriters compared to Zercho's 160; while the students had scholastic qualifications they needed routine speed skills. But by 1921

103 ibid., 23 January and 5 February 1915. No distinction is made between temporary and permanent positions.
High School expansion began to dwarf business college expansion. Business colleges found their further expansion was limited by public education. 8000 pupils left Victorian post-primary schools in 1921. Although he "would not stoop" to circularizing each pupil, as he claimed other business college proprietors were doing, Zercho sent circular letters to selected schools to encourage their students to go on to Zercho's. From midway through 1921, Zercho started "doing the schools", going "out at about 9.45 and ...[spending] the whole day" interviewing principals. As competition increased Zercho hoped the Education Department would get tired of "making clerks".

The business schools also attempted to woo girls from "good" schools. They advertised that pupils from Merton Hall, Fintona, Camberwell, Brighton, Presbyterian Ladies' College and Methodist Ladies' College attended their schools. An ex-Zercho's teacher was in charge of the Methodist Ladies' College and students were recommended to "finish off" at Zercho's. In 1917, the Methodist Ladies' College was the first of Melbourne's private girls' schools to establish a business department. It offered a one-year diploma course or a fuller two-years typewriting, shorthand and bookkeeping course for 15 to 17 years olds. In describing the new department, Dr. Fitchett, who joined the Methodist Ladies' College in 1882, declared that the business course constituted a third reason why a girl should go to a private girls' school: she could now be trained for business, as well as for home-life or the university and one of the professions. Zercho's own daughter, "Girlie" had been privately-educated. She joined Zercho's in February 1916 and by September had reached the second grade. After several temporary positions,

105 ibid., 23 June and 17 November 1921.
106 ibid., 22 August 1921.
she won a job as a junior on the Governor General's staff and was promoted to private secretary to his wife, Lady Foster, from whence she left to marry. The business girl's education before attending Zercho's played an important role in her employment prospects.

The nature of business colleges changed from selective, comprehensive teaching to mass teaching. Instead of two year courses, the business colleges began to introduce shorter courses and simplified training schemes such as easier shorthand systems. Bradshaw's introduced a 26:6:6 system of shorthand in January 1916. It claimed that the new system could achieve the same result in an hour a day for 14 weeks as a year long Pitman's course could achieve in two hours a day.

Zercho's had established a standard of efficiency claiming that students had to pass second grade before they would recommend a position. That is, a student had to take shorthand dictated at 100 words per minute and transcribe it by typing at least 25 words per minute without error. Only 17% of the 448 students with completed progress reports for 1916 had reached that standard. The average length of tuition was 13 months. By 1922, while the standard of 'efficiency' had not improved, Zercho's had "cut the length of study to the shortest possible". Saturday classes were established. He admitted that it was "wonderful how we squeeze ... [the new students] in". Shorthand theory classes with over a hundred students were held. Many more women in employment did short courses in shorthand or on adding machine operation. As one woman recounted:

109 Argus, 22 January 1918.
111 Zercho's Outward Letterbook, Zercho to Chartres, 7 December 1922.
In 1916, I had commercial experience. I was in an estate office. It was in the small way...[I attended] business college for only two quarters, [but] didn't finish [the shorthand course]. 112

By 1933, Zercho's still offered a £28 comprehensive course, but most students took 12 week courses on single subjects for £1/5/- 113

Rather than simply schools of unskilled, working class girls, business colleges’ student population became more heterogeneous. Working class or unskilled girls were new to business colleges. An examination of Zercho's progress records suggests that from 1915 the college had an increasing battle in getting some of its recruits to become well-trained and to assume middle-class appearance and behaviour. Miss Joliffe was spoken to many times for her unladylike conduct...[She was] Found doing the block with others after school. Just wants to have a good time. Tampering with spelling paper when correcting making wrong words appear right. 114

Jean Graham was a nuisance and made to sit by herself for, in addition to being surly, she broke dress rules. Miss Cooper wore torn blouses and was so untidy that she was forbidden to attend the Young Women’s Christian Association’s business girls’ cafeteria for lunch. It was not just a matter of loitering on street corners, talking to boys and defiance of dress rules that are noteworthy. It was a matter of physical propriety. Zercho claimed that a pleasant girl would always find an employer even if she was not strikingly efficient. He also claimed that a fast and competent typiste would seldom do well if her manners were ragged. 115

Amy Browne's appearance was "totally against her—absolutely dirty" and Agnes Beckewaite was a "very dirty looking individual". Poor A. de Lacy did nothing to redeem her poor typing by her appearance:

112 Transcript, Judgement and Award for Female Bank Officers, New South Wales, 1928, Mary McQuane's evidence, see also Jessie Bootle's evidence, 6 June 1928, pp. 19 and 13, ABL A2/37/2.
114 Zercho's Progress Reports, 30 September 1921.
115 Herald, 19 April 1933.
the girl's appearance is miserable and will handicap her in gaining any kind of position no matter how simple. She is one of the worst specimens of the College.

Discussing 'unsuccessful' students with a colleague, Zercho suggested they be recommended for general clerical and switchboard work and not sent to good positions which would reflect badly on the colleges.116 By the 1920s, business college managers had a range of jobs they could send a student to.

There were no hordes, however. Female business college graduates formed only a small and decreasing part of the labour supply. Moreover, the feminization of business colleges and shorthand school enrolments for all Victoria only increased from 31% in 1913 to 52% in 1933.117 There were nearly as many males as females officially enrolled in Victorian business colleges. Business college education was sexually divided just as the labour market was: females attended the daytime business courses and males did correspondence courses.

5.5 Correspondence School and University Educated Business Boys

All junior men were regarded as "potential managers" in the business manuals which appeared around the beginning of the war. Young boys were extolled to grow up to be "manly and be gentlemen, with a keen... perception of duty".118 In the interwar period, however, the simple gender message was discarded. Employers and the media began to discuss the different prospects for the successful and the average men in business. While "99 per cent" of chain stores made internal appointments to fill management positions,

116 Zercho's Outward Letterbook, Zercho to Chartres, 18 August 1925.
117 Australian Yearbooks- Education: 1913, p. 786, 3764 males and 1695 females; 1923, p. 462, 3903 males and 2014 females; 1933, p. 296, 2378 males and 2533 females. The official figures probably underestimate the numbers.
118 Moran and Cato, Hints to Better Salesmanship, n.d., c. 1920, pp. 4 and 16, SLV, MS 10325.
the management or primary labour market was clearly defined in shop and office labour forces after the war.\textsuperscript{119} Education was integral to this definition.

In the 1920s all boys and youths with aspirations could still type. Youths who wanted to advance in the clerical division of the Railways were urged to attend the Victoria Railway Institute classes in commercial and railway book-keeping, accountancy, typewriting, shorthand and advanced English.\textsuperscript{120} It was a bonus if general clerks or accountants could type, even when they were one-armed as in Clarence Ingram's case.\textsuperscript{121} There was a renaissance in typing during the depression when youths had to put their hands to any work needing to be done. Elders' managers seriously considered dispensing with female typists in early 1930s.\textsuperscript{122} Shorthand and typing courses at boys' schools were ended in the 1930s, however.

Young ambitious boys dropped typing during the interwar period and turned to correspondence courses and higher commercial education. These avenues for reskilling in private and state educational facilities developed at a time when few individual retail or commercial employers were concerned about enhancing their workforce's formal education. They were relying on the public education system for male recruitment also. On their own or their parents' initiative, young males were enrolling in education courses which they hoped would enhance their opportunities to become management executives. These qualifications were standardized and transferable.

First, business colleges provided separate courses for men. At the same time that business colleges were encouraging girls to take their day courses, offers were made to men already in shop and office jobs to take accountancy and

\textsuperscript{119} George J. Coles, \textit{Chain Store Economics and Organizations}, Melbourne, 1928, p. 16.  
\textsuperscript{120} \textit{Herald}, 17 July 1919.  
\textsuperscript{121} Goldsborough, Mort and Company, ABL, 2A, 2292 1-2.  
\textsuperscript{122} Elders, Report on the work done by the Lady Staff during 1933, ABL z220/190.
advertising courses. A business diploma would help them to "better their positions", "increase their income", put themselves on the "road to success". Business schools targeted servicemen during the war. There were seven main schools involved in correspondence teaching in Melbourne by 1917. They focused on white collar and semi-professional male students aged 20 years and older. State education did not cater for this group. The seven schools had a combined enrolment of about 4000 in 1917, with the International Correspondence School having 2000 alone. The Council of Public Education reported critically on the correspondence schools, suggesting that the State regulate them or take over their function, but the schools were left to flourish unregulated.

Promising young shop assistants attended business college courses. In 1918, Bradshaw's introduced a special course for shop assistants.

From now on [business houses] will able to staff their salesforces with trained men and women. It's goodbye to the inefficient.

The course was supervised by a "master Draper" with an expert knowledge of psychology as applied to selling. Bradshaw's claimed leading businesses were encouraging their existing staff to do the course to increase their own "efficiency and advance". Enrolments in these courses were all men.

---

123 Teaching by post: Clerk, 31 May 1912; Argus, 24 May 1912; Age, 12 December 1912.
124 See, for example, Stott's and Hemingway and Robertson's Correspondence College advertisements, Argus, 26 May 1913.
125 Clerk, 7 October 1917.
126 These schools were: International Correspondence Schools Ltd., Hemingway and Robertson, Australian Correspondence School, Stott's Correspondence College, Zercho's Correspondence College, Bradshaw's Business College and Tyne Engineering Institute.
128 Argus, 11 July 1908. Bradshaw's established an advertising department from July 1907.
129 Spectator, 12 December 1917.
130 Argus, 22 January 1918.
Secondly, the state provided commercial university education after the war. Businesses made it clear that they wanted a range of male recruits. The Council of Public Education submitted a scheme of commercial education to the Minister in 1917. It recommended that provision to be made by the State for "four types of pupils": those doing continuation courses, intermediate courses in high schools, senior commercial courses and university commercial courses.131 Concern was also expressed in the Council of Public Education's Report on Commercial Education over the lack of provision for higher commercial education. The professional commercial bodies voicing this concern looked enviously at the endowments made by American business to high schools of commerce. The Council of Public Education suggested that the State should provide what the Victorian business community did not. 132 The Commerce Faculty at the University of Melbourne was opened catering for a male elite in 1924.133 In 1930 a lecturer in marketing and salesmanship was appointed.

The effect of these educational facilities can be seen amongst banking staff. Formal appointment criteria stated that males had to be between 15 and 17 years old, except that 18 year olds could be employed if they had a Leaving Certificate. Progression on the basis of seniority would lead most of these appointments to positions of responsibility. The State Bank of Victoria in the 1910s instituted automatic progression for male bank employees from £40 at recruitment to £315 at 27. Promotion from this grade depended upon the individual merit of officers as well as the number of positions which was

131 ibid., 7 June 1917.
133 There were 570 exam scripts marked in 1925 and 860 in 1935. Women made up only 5.3% of those sitting commercial examination in accountancy and business practice, economic geography, economic history and economics in 1925. By 1935, women made up 11.3% of those sitting commercial examinations but they were disproportionately represented in economic geography and economic history and not represented in advanced accountancy, auditing, bank currency and exchange, commercial and industrial organization. Melbourne University Exam Results, 1925 and 1935, UOM.
determined by the growth of business and the death and retirement rates.  
Banks began to define one element of merit as extra accreditation for which 
they would pay more. Increasingly, young males were judged on the basis 
of success in exams beyond Intermediate and Leaving Certificates. The 
number of candidates for the Bankers' Institute preliminary exam almost 
doubled from 377 in 1913, 574 in 1916 to 626 in 1924 which was more than 
the increase in bank staff.

The Commonwealth Bank officials made it quite clear that senior staff should 
seek further education. It instituted lectures in "high branches" of accountancy 
and commercial law for senior male staff in 1920. These lectures were 
reprinted in Bank Notes, the staff journal which was established in 1918 and 
distributed to all employees. Employers encouraged their clerical staff to 
study towards "bettering themselves". In 1930, the Commonwealth Bank 
published an assessment of the number of its higher qualified staff who 
numbered 127 out of a staff of 1416 or 9%: nine had Bachelors of Commerce 
degrees presumably from the Melbourne Department of Commerce; 21 
diplomas of Commerce; 78 had passed final accountancy exams; eight had 
passed the Australian Institute of Secretary's exams and 11 had passed the 
final examinations of the Bankers' Institute. They were all men.

The Public Service Commissioner was also concerned about the coaching of 
a public service elite. Under the terms of the 1923 University Act, five free 
university places were to be granted on the bond of three years' employment 
on completion to government employees (other than teachers). In the

---

135 General Manager's Correspondence Files, 1 April 1927, State Bank of Victoria Archives, series 746.
137 Bank Notes. December 1921, January-October 1922,
twenties almost half the places went to clerical staff doing courses in commerce, 17 out of 36. The 198 staff having university and higher institute qualifications in 1937 were said to guarantee a "high degree of efficiency in future departmental administration". 138 In 1926, an inquiry attributed the conservatism and wasteful methods in the Victorian public service to the nigh-on retirement age at appointment of executives to chief administrative positions. 139 The report recommended that there be a prerequisite of university training in administration for all those promoted to higher positions as well as an age limit. Moreover, grade tests for promotion were proposed. Incompetent young men would be weeded out if they did not pass the first promotion test by 25. The public service workforce continued to gain general education qualifications through the public education system, however. Those with educational qualifications were considered the promising young men.

In line with large offices' policies, the promotion policy of the large stores that "every boy who comes into the company sets out to be store manager" was changing. 140 The road to executive promotion in G. J. Coles was "storeman, sales, floorman, sub-Manager, Store Manager, Executive position". As George Coles made clear in 1928, however, the more usual path for shop executives was not to concentrate upon shop assisting. 141 Ambitious, young men were advised to study a six-month elementary course on bookkeeping. Then they would do an inhouse training course, "Chain Store Staff Instruction Course" written especially for Coles Stores. There was no coercion involved. Young men were keen, "often before they were ready", to do this study.

139 Report of J. Wallace Ross, Esq., (AICA, AAIS, ACA of Wilson, Ross and Company, Public Accountants), who was appointed a Board of Inquiry to Inquire into the Methods in the Public Service, 1926, pp. 4, 55 and 84, VPP, 1927, 2.
140 Colesanco, 5/21, September 1931.
141 Coles, Chain Store, pp. 16-19.
In the 1920s, every male staff member in the Myer Emporium went through the staff sales school. From the 1930s promising young men began to be differentiated from the mass. Myer's management made clear that its higher training was not only differentiated by gender but restricted to some young males. As it was observed, "the Staff [who] come to us well equipped" were "Clerks, Waitresses, Telephonists, etc.," and they were women.\footnote{142} There were separate training courses for boys and girls. There were also courses for women and men who had to be equipped to "assume responsibility" later. Men would not only assume responsibility but would be promoted up the hierarchy. Voluntarily, 200 young male staff attended evening groups to learn all that a prospective manager should know about finance, stock control, advertising, staff supervision, business arithmetic...\footnote{143}

In 1938, Myer's introduced through its staff training centre a "New Senior Course For Ambitious Men" with its maxim "earning power is in proportion to learning power".

Women were not a reserve army for these jobs, nor were most men, because they could not effectively substitute for them. They did not have access to the same educational opportunities.

5.6 Conclusion: A Workforce Reshaping Through the Education System

Reserve army of labour arguments predict either a labour supply of unskilled working class women undermining male labour or a skilled middle class female labour supply taking over male occupations. Educational material does not support either argument. Educated, middle class women's entry into male-dominated white collar work in the 1880s and 1890s was discussed in

\footnote{142} Myer, \textit{Synopsis of 1938 Training Courses, First to Seventh Years}, Melbourne, 1938, Coles-Myer Archives.
Chapter 2. The recruitment of younger girls with above-average education from humbler backgrounds was discussed in Chapter 3. The expansion of education for young women from a wider socio-economic background can be illustrated by examining the business college. I have argued that the provision of free state secondary education broadened the socio-economic background of commercial girls. Business colleges offer a good example of the social and educational heterogeneity of commercial labour which was developing. Shop and office work attracted girls from both middle class and working class backgrounds.

Women's continued increasing employment in shops and offices raises problems for reserve army of labour arguments. The reserve army of labour phenomenon proves to be more complicated than simply a change in the sexual division of labour. Women exhibit, internally, some of the characteristics attributed to them as a group. Some women could be become more typical than other women. That is, the long term processes of working class women's traditional employment stagnating and the effect of state-provided secondary schooling produced female reservists among women. Similarly, male shop assistants and clerks were not competing with women so much as with other men. Instead of young, unskilled women, even those of the middle class, they were competing with older, skilled males. Educational credentials were not simply used to differentiate between the sexes but employers used them to differentiate among groups of workers of the same gender.
23. **Myer Emporium Ltd., Accounts Department, 1920s**

This job was in the main office of a large chain of Grocery Stores in South Melbourne, about 50 females, typists, clerks, Accounting Machinists etc., -row upon row of them, under the ever watchful eye of the BOSS, who sat in a glass enclosed office-his eagle eye noting any unnecessary chatter or tomfoolery.

Jean Silverton, (pseudonym), Work History, paid employment from c.1932.

We didn't have a career in the 1920s. I had a job- or position. I was 15 years old- a junior- when I started work in 1926- at the Vacuum Oil Co. then located in William Street. Melbourne... It was a large office for those days, perhaps 100-200, I couldn't be sure. Approximately half were women. I lived with my mother, who was a widow, and younger brother. She had a small business- a milkbar/tearooms. I worked in the shop after my office job...I always had to 'help in the shop' after school and office hours. My Aunt was already working at the Vacuum Oil Co. She had been one of the first women to be employed by them in about 1907/08. It was through her I got the job...I was in an Invoicing Dept., and did not start typing until I was in 2nd or 3rd year. Several Juniors seemed to spend most of our time 'carboning' invoice books for the typists....I did dislike the handling of carbon. We were always very dirty. I never did become a senior, [retrenched at 21] therefore did not move out of the Dispatch Dept. There were about 6-8 other women in my typist room.

Beryl White, (pseudonym), Work History, paid employment from 1926.

24. **Foy and Gibson Ltd., Gibsonia Woollen Mills, Engineer's Workshop Office, Whitework and Underclothing Section, 1922.**

There were about 12 office staff, this included Managers [at Welch, Margetson and Co., Shirt Manufacturers]. It was a fairly large factory for those days, I suppose there would be about 100-150 altogether in the factory. There was a big barrier between office and factory staff and any socializing was frowned upon...My working conditions were very basic. I had a desk, with the usual accessories, a phone and a typewriter, a Remington, which was pretty old, and which was replaced when I was there. There were three desks in the room, my boss, (a spinster lady, very prim) and my senior. We had one high window facing Swanston Street. At one end of the office was a sort of open cupboard containing tea, coffee, biscuits, etc., but our tea was made at a sink down the passage near the toilets. We ate our lunches at our desks...We thought twice about taking any time off, because of the chilly atmosphere when returning. I think conditions in office varied a lot, maybe ours was a little primitive than most. I think big department stores like Myer's or solicitor's offices were considered more desirable places to work than in a factory office...

Helen Rubie, (pseudonym), Work History, paid employment from 1937.
'Promotion' to Machines?

25. Commonwealth Bank, Accounts Machines, 1926

Ledger machine operators were usually chosen from the existing staff. If you were a proficient typist and considered suitable, the company would train you on their time and at company expense. I think they went to a training school set up by the vendors of the machines. I know I was told if I went to business college at night and learned typing they would train me as a ledger machine operator.

Florence Brown, (pseudonym), Work History, paid employment from 1936.

During two years of tea making, calling up orders and sorting order slips into batches, I became fascinated by the Accountancy Machines- old Vertical Remington Models they were (the Accountancy Machine Operators were the office elite) the BOSS decided to send me into Zercho’s Business College in Collins Street to be trained on the machines- I was in Seventh Heaven. I was up the first rung.

Jean Silverton, (pseudonym), Work History, paid employment from 1932.

Burrough’s Calculators were used in those days by the seniors [Foy and Gibson’s Department Store] and I asked the boss if I could teach myself how to use them during my lunch time. This caused jealousy with the other juniors so it ended that several of the other girls obtained permission to use these machines. I remember the seniors were not very pleased. I managed to add and subtract on these machines but had no idea how to do % so back to mother and she had me go to a lady, whose name I cannot remember, who was a B. of Comm., and had taught my sister when she wanted to be a nurse. It cost 10/- an half hour tuition, but money well spent.

Irene Golding, (pseudonym), Work History, paid employment from 1927.

26. Myer Emporium Ltd., Tube Room, 1920s

During the past year a fresh avenue has been opened up for the employment of females in the Public Service. It was evident, from the frequent demands of Departments for the services of females in a temporary capacity as Shorthand Writers and Typists, that opportunities existed for the permanent utilization of this class of labour, and arrangements were therefore made for competitive examinations in New South Wales and Victoria, to enable young women to qualify for the position of Typist in the General Division. The result was gratifying, in that some 268 candidates presented themselves for examination, and amongst those who qualified for appointment were a number who were probably the most expert Typists to be found in the Commonwealth...The argument frequently advanced that a bare minimum of education, combined with average intelligence, is all that is required for the performance of routine departmental work is fallacious in the extreme.

I was educated at a Catholic Girls' School in Mentone and was one of the few who went on to year 11 which was then matriculation... So I was sent to Hassett's Business College in Chapel Street, Prahran... it was cheaper than Stott's, Zercho's and Bradshaw's... I finished at the business college in December 1938 and began looking for work in January 1939. I answered advertisements, I had good references, I was still only 16. I walked up and down Collins Street knocking on doors of banks and insurance companies. My father got an old typewriter from a friend who had had a fire in his office and I used this charred old machine to keep up my speed. My first job was for about a month with the Victorian Railways Institute where I typed and did filing with no pay because my father worked in the railways and knew the man in charge- it was costing nearly 10/- a week for train fares. Finally I got a letter of appointment to the State Electricity Commission of Victoria... one of about forty females in the corresponding department. Despite the fact that to get the job one needed high qualifications I didn't touch a typewriter for five weeks I was there. My job was to carry a large basket every half hour to "do the run"... [Then] I received an offer of a job with the State Savings Bank of Victoria. I had done a shorthand typing test for the bank in January and although I didn't get the vacancy then existing I was next on the list. The work in the bank was a little better. I wasn't allowed to touch a typewriter for about 18 months... For all of this the Matriculated, secretarial-trained, carefully-selected young women received 25 shillings per week less tax and provident fund deduction leaving about 22 shillings... After about two years I became a typist, new juniors taking over the inferior jobs, but the typewriters for the most junior were positively antique and we were only allowed to type work which was not considered important....
Geraldine Rubery, (pseudonym), Work History, paid employment from 1939.

28. State Bank of Victoria, Department Heads Including Dora Thacker, 1934
In the public service, for example, women are rarely paid more than between £170 and £200 a year. The public service offers no important positions to women... The most highly paid salaried positions appear to be reserved for skilled buyers for the large shops. Woman buyers in Melbourne are paid any sum from £500 to £1000 a year... Women secretaries and accountants are well paid. Probably the best paid woman secretary in Melbourne has £600 a year... While the more successful business woman... continues to work when married... the women on smaller salaries forsake the office for the home. Women in offices are usually single.
Argus, 9 January 1930.
Business Girl: The modern girl, with her combination of grasp and beauty, has built herself into the full natural of some
sensible and some temperate. She brings the atmosphere of the house to the office, with
her eye on her; her sense of humor, her graceful puff and angular facade.
Successful 'Business Girls' in Shops

29. Myer Emporium Ltd., Shop Assistants with Cash Register, 1920s

One day on my way to work there was a long queue of young women in the old Her Majesty’s Arcade in Pitt Street, Sydney. So decided to ascertain why. It appeared Woolworths Nothing Over 2/6 in those days were interviewing people for their big move into new premises....I inadvertently got pushed along with the crowd and happened to be one chosen. The person doing the choosing just looked us up and down and said "you", "not you", "you", "not you" and so it came about I became a sales lady.

Edna Green, (pseudonym), Work History, paid employment from 1930.

I graduated from Business College in 1929. A position was obtained for me through the College and I was there for a few months. Unfortunately for me and others the firm was closed down and we were out of work. Later that year Mother thought it would be a good idea to try the Big Store [Prahran] which was large and employed many people, close to trains, buses and trams. No vacancies in the office then and I started in the shop.

Ellen Berry, (pseudonym), Work History, paid employment from 1929.

Yes, for some time my father was out of work, having lost his business because of the depression. There was no dole, I think he got a weeks work on the roads- There was my mother and father, sister and brother at home and the money I earned was the only money coming into the house. Luckily the wages I earned at the theatre [second job as usherette at nights] helped a lot.

Dorothy Gray, (pseudonym), Work History, paid employment from 1928.

30. Adeline Keating, Myer Emporium Ltd., Toy Buyer , 1920

I went for an interview with the manager...arranged through my father a pathologist...I must have made a good impression because a casual job was offered behind the counter... six weeks prior to Christmas. I was told to return after Christmas and I worked behind the counter of various departments for two years and then put in charge of what was then called stationery section, during this time I was in charge of change required and ordering stock, later becoming "floor walker", becoming the head of cosmetics... later in charge of the ground floor....1938 I was told I would be included in what was named the "Store Opening Committee" which consisted of a group about 8...who would lay out the counters of new stores [around Australia]... [and then ] I was told by the Manager to report to the personnel department of Head Office [one morning]...with no thoughts of why I had been called... I was appointed as Assistant Buyer to the Cosmetic Buyer 1938 to 9...there were 4 girls chosen from the staff of some 60 stores ...[to be buyers]...we had plenty to learn, contacting suppliers, interviewing them, allocating stock...

Kate Coffey, (pseudonym), Work History, paid employment from 1933.
Chapter Six:
Employers Rule over Female Retail and Clerical Labour Factories in Victoria in the 1920s and 1930s?

The large and heavy desks which had been in use for the ledgers for so many years...were now sent into store to await some future call. Old desks and tables were picked up like matchboxes, and new ledger tables and machine tables took their places. In the banking chamber the open space soon became a maze of typistes' tables, and in a very few minutes fifty-five typewriters were being tapped by as many fair young ladies, who attacked their work with vigour and a determination to finish as soon as possible. The final transfer from the old pen-and-ink method to the new machine system was thus commenced...¹

6.1 Scientific Management and Workforce Homogeneity

It is often argued that the application of scientific management to shops and offices was the important tool employers used to achieve a homogeneous, deskilled workforce. The early twentieth century scientific management movement was inspired by Frederick Taylor and his writings. On the basis of his experience as an industrial foreman in Philadelphia, he advocated increasing productivity by reorganization; the systematic subdivision of jobs and careful surveillance of workers. A new managerial group should control the work process in which efficient workers would attend machines performing fragmented production tasks. Deskilled, routine, subservient workers operating machines should replace skilled, manual, powerful workers. Authors soon applied Taylorism and the principles of efficiency- planning, scheduling, executing, measuring and rewarding output- beyond the factory floor to shops and offices.² William Leffingwell, the most prolific of these authors, began writing practical manuals on scientific management for offices of 100 staff or more during World War One.³ Leffingwell was an engineer

¹ Bank Notes, August 1925, pp. 6-14, 'A New System: Posting Ledgers by Machines in our [Commonwealth] Savings Bank Department'.
² For a list of the classic texts, see the bibliography in Frank McClelland, Office Training and Standards, Chicago, 1920, pp. 263-76.
who was closely associated with the National Association of Office Appliance Manufacturers.4

Harry Braverman is foremost amongst those who have argued that the successful application of scientific management from the first decades of the twentieth century reduced shop and office work to the same level as factory work.5 Similarly, in Australian historiography, scientific management is said to have been applied in shops and offices in the interwar period; it particularly affected women who performed the routine and mechanized jobs in shops and offices in increasing and disproportionate numbers.6 It has become generally accepted that in the 1920s and 1930s commercial workers became a base of women machinists and systematized workers controlled by male managements versed in Taylorism. I have argued that segmentation rather than homogenization occurred. How do I explain away scientific management?

It is clear that the Victorian business community and union leaders were versed in scientific management. Some volumes among the avalanche of management literature on clerical and retailing labour found their way onto Victorian managers' bookshelves. Certain Melbourne shop and office employers were making comparisons between employees who were thus encouraged to speed up their work knowing that they were under closer surveillance. From 1917, the Melbourne union journal, Clerk, warned of the introduction of the "card system" or "methods of Frederick Winston Taylor".


6 For example, Jill Matthews, Good and Mad Women: The historical construction of femininity in twentieth century Australia, Sydney, 1984, pp. 94-6.
Individual Victorian employers, such as retailers George Coles and Sidney Myer, and bankers, such as Alex Cooch of the Victorian State Bank, applauded efficiency and mechanization after making the pilgrimage to observe North American systems first hand. By the 1930s, Victorian business colleges included 'scientific management' in their curriculum.7

While scientific management ideas were rife in interwar Melbourne, their realization is another matter. Braverman's thesis has initiated a wide debate, or perhaps it would be more correct to say, re-invigorated an old debate.8 In 1958, David Lockwood contradicted Klingender's earlier Marxist analysis of the proletarianization of the skilled male clerk.9 Lockwood stressed that office work remained different from manufacturing work in important ways. While much had changed in clerical work, remuneration and status differences between clerical and factory work remained.10

A similar case to the one Lockwood made for Britain can also be made for Victoria. The pace and extent of a scientifically managed clerical workforce in interwar Australia was limited. Mary Sheedy, for example, concluded that, as a result of slower economic development than in North America and Western Europe, there had been no "integration of office activities on a scientific basis" in Australia before 1939. Australian office methods "lagged several decades behind the factory and the shop" and it was not until the

7 Clerk, 7 September 1917. George J. Cole, Chain Store Economics and Organisation, Melbourne, 1928. Colesanco, 4/22, December 1931, p. 7. Bright and Hitchcocks scrapbooks contain a collection of contemporary magazine articles on efficiency. See, Alan Marshall's autobiography, In Mine Own Heart, Melbourne, 1963, pp. 53 ff. where he describes elaborate systems planned in the three person office in which he was accountant in the 1930s which were sabotaged by workers. He was a clerk in a Melbourne factory which was owned by a "systems expert" who employed "a Professor Bryon Boggs" for whom there was a "current craze" in Melbourne to analyze his staff scientifically for promotion qualities.


1940s that larger offices were reorganized for efficiency.\textsuperscript{11} That is, it has been argued that rationalization was occurring in the largest Australian stores in the interwar period and that offices followed a little later. This view has been qualified more recently. Gail Reekie has argued that while scientific management was introduced into Sydney's big stores before 1930, it was ameliorated by costly 'irrational' welfare provisions and conditions which were better than those stipulated in industrial awards.\textsuperscript{12}

In this chapter, I present a more comprehensive survey of scientific management and welfarism in shops and offices during the interwar period than has been made to date. This does not involve simply a restatement of Lockwood's argument using Victorian data. I argue, further, that not all Victorian employers wanted to implement scientific management: it was not just that they were backward or that they had to compromise with workers over welfarism and arbitration. Victorian management decisions were not simply immature or unsuccessful. They were not designed to promote a homogeneous workforce, or even a homogeneous secondary female labour force. Management decisions in Victoria in the 1920s and 1930s wittingly and unwittingly promoted a heterogeneous workforce.

The foundations of this argument have been laid by segmentalists. Segmentalists have pointed out that heterogeneity increased with the emergence of segmented white collar labour force consisting of a privileged, predominantly male, primary labour market and a disadvantaged,


predominantly female, secondary labour market. Segmented internal labour markets developed in the largest firms.\textsuperscript{13}

Braverman's supporters and their segmentalist opponents might disagree over the question of whether the workforce is tending towards homogeneity or heterogeneity, but both associate whatever change is occurring with large-scale market competition and growing workplace size. Braverman argued that the

application of modern methods of management and machine technology, however, become practical only with the rapid increase in the scale of production.\textsuperscript{14}

Edwards and others who argued that workers have become more stratified rather than homogenized place a similar emphasis on the size of the firm:

The workplace today is a vastly changed place from the shops and offices of seventy-five or a hundred years ago. Then nearly all employees worked for small firms, while today large numbers toil for the giant corporations. Here especially we see the results of the twentieth-century transformation of work.\textsuperscript{15}

Edwards and his co-authors criticize a crude equation between firm size and labour transformation, a concentration upon seeing the entire twentieth century as "one single stage of "monopoly capitalism".\textsuperscript{16} Larger consolidated capital units, however, still play "an important role" in their analysis of the process of labour transformation. Indeed, most historical accounts of white collar feminization are centred on the largest firms.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{14} Braverman, \textit{Labor and Monopoly Capital}, pp. 236 and 315.
I do not concentrate on large workplaces or the developing dichotomy between primary and secondary labour markets in large workplaces for two compelling reasons. First, the novel development in the interwar period was that the secondary labour market was becoming segmented. Competitive economic forces did not result in all women's jobs becoming equally bad. Managers, for instance, were beginning to employ married women, often in part-time jobs with no promotion prospects. Secondly, this segmentation was developing in Victoria without the universal expansion of large corporate entities and managerial hierarchies. Most shop and office workers were employed in small workplaces. Employers promoted heterogeneity in this way, unwittingly. Diverse conditions of employment occurred in the absence of large employers taking over the labour market. Victorian shop and office workers and workplaces became more diverse in the interwar period.

6.2 Scientific Management's Extent and Relationship with Feminization

Shop and office workers in Victoria in the interwar period were increasingly women; indeed women became the majority between the wars. Machines were increasingly employed in commerce. Women operated the machines. Large employers of labour expanded in the interwar period. And yet, the majority of commercial workers were not machine operating, scientifically-managed female employees in large 'retail and clerical factories' with similar conditions of employment. I reach this conclusion by making three distinctions: feminization is distinguished from mechanization; mechanization is distinguished from scientific management; and growth in large rationalizing employers is distinguished from growth in rationalized worksites.

Melbourne shops and offices clearly mechanized which would seem to support the homogeneity case. Most office machinery had to be imported
and import data was kept from 1904. Graph 6-1 indicates the amount spent on typewriters trebled between 1905 and 1912 and dropped during the depression. When examining the data it has to be remembered that the capacity of typewriters improved as the basic price dropped so the mechanization wave in the late 1930s was more marked than the graph indicates. In 1908, the basic Remington no. 10 visible cost £25 while a basic Remington cost £15 in 1930. Moreover, second-hand and rebuilt Remingtons for a "few pounds" were available from the First World War and machines could be hired for an annual fee of £4.19

Graph 6-1: Importation of Typewriters by £-value, 1904-39
Source: Overseas Trade Bulletins, ABS

---

19 Clerk, 7 September 1917. Age, 8 March 1922.
Graph 6-2 shows the rise in the number of typewriters and adding machines imported in the late 1930s.

Graph 6-2: Importation of Office Machines to Victoria by Unit Numbers, 1931-39
Source: Overseas Trade Bulletins, ABS

Women typically operated telephone exchanges, typewriters and adding machines: 99.5% of those classified as typists and clerical machinists in Victoria were women in the 1933 census. The largest employers of clerks and shop assistants, banks, insurance companies, the public service and department stores all had mechanization programmes and considered scientific management and feminization strategies in the interwar period.20

Machines were automatically accompanied by women. The Commonwealth Bank mechanized its pen and ink methods starting with the Sydney head office in 1925. In October 1926, the Melbourne branch of the Commonwealth Bank began the ledger posting of 119,275 accounts which had been processed by hand previously. There was no debate over who would operate

---
20 The 1933 census disaggregated approximately 115,000 clerks and typists-office machinists by industry for Australia. The industries with the largest proportion of these office staff were the Civil Service (17%), Banking (13%), Railways (8%), Insurance (6%), Law (5%), Accounting and Auditing, Shipping, Estate Agents and Department Stores (3%): Census of the Commonwealth, 1933, Occupations of the People, Table 4.
bank ledger posting machines: women were employed as operators.\textsuperscript{21} The machine agents were brokers promoting both machine systems advice and feminization. As early as 1913, Chartres Proprietary Ltd., Remington typewriter agents, were advertising not only "automatic accuracy" but that their "systems expert" could save Melbourne businesses time.\textsuperscript{22} When Temperance and General Insurance installed Moon-Hopkins accounting machines for keeping loan accounts in 1931, the Burroughs company provided a woman, Miss L. Hinde, to teach the female staff how to operate the machines. Company managers justified employing women to operate the second generation machines just as others had justified employing women typists at the turn of the century: experience taught them that boys did not have "the delicacy of touch that is necessary in machine operating".\textsuperscript{23}

It became official public service policy in the 1920s and 1930s to employ women in mechanized pools. Efficiency and economy had been considered in a series of inquiries into the Victorian public service in 1859, 1873, 1900, 1917 and 1926. H. O. Allan wrote a critical report on the Melbourne departmental correspondence systems and records systems in 1917 which was an appendix to the main report. A special departmental systems committee specifically investigated departmental organization in 1923. It recommended improvements in "routine systems" and the introduction of "mechanical aids". A circular promoting efficiency and economy was distributed amongst public servants in 1925 which called upon them to suggest efficiency measures.\textsuperscript{24} These initiatives culminated in 1926 when J. Wallace Ross, a member of a Melbourne firm of public accountants, was

\textsuperscript{21} Bank Notes, October 1926, p. 21.
\textsuperscript{22} Australasian Leather Journal, 15 October 1913, p. 347.
\textsuperscript{23} Temperance and General Staff Records, Appointment Book, 36 July 1932, National Mutual Archives.
commissioned to conduct a classic efficiency inquiry. He investigated public service methods to determine if there was 'waste, extravagance, overlapping or overstaffing'. Matters as detailed as inappropriate stationery forms and the "pernicious" practice of eating lunch at desks were commented upon in typical Taylorist language: when "multiplied" these small inefficiencies represented gross waste of clerical time and labour. The inquiry discovered that previous recommendations for reform remained unimplemented and concluded that such response to reform was unacceptable in a mechanizing world. Moreover, the public service should make more use of machines and women to operate them.

Ross recommended urgent reforms relating to organization and mechanization. The public service structure needed to be reorganized. In particular, the commissioner, the chief executive, should be given 'real' powers to institute efficiency uniformly in departments which had come to resemble "watertight compartments". Responsibility for efficiency had to be made clear and needed to be delegated from the commissioner down. Throughout the service suitably-designed office accommodation was needed to ensure supervision of staff while labour saving devices were sadly lacking in particular departments. Departments which spread through several ill-designed buildings gave small groups of workers great opportunities for idling away from the eyes of supervisors:

The only satisfactory method of supervising large office staffs is for them to be accommodated in big well-lighted, and ventilated rooms without any obstruction to the view of the supervising officers, who preferably should have his table and seat raised above the floor level.

25 Ross' Methods Inquiry, 1926.
26 ibid., p. 6.
The employment of women featured together with recommendations over mechanization. Ross recommended the use of cash registers in revenue departments, carbon copying of returns, machine balancing and ledger posting. Women were said to perform typewriting, registration work, adding machine operating and sorting much better than men. Ross advocated that women should replace "many" positions held by men. Indeed, they performed routine mechanical jobs so well that it outweighed the one day more in sick leave women took on average compared to men.

The Commonwealth was ahead of the Victorian public service in establishing both scientifically managed pools of women machinists and 'resident efficiency experts'. The Public Service Amending Act authorized the appointment of a Public Service Inspectorate in 1912. Again in 1920, the Royal Commission enquiring into the Commonwealth public service proposed the appointment of a staff of "experts in the science of modern office systems and appliances" to overhaul office management. The Commonwealth Statistician was at the forefront of scientific management in Victoria having introduced the "card system" in 1912: records were kept of employees' performances and at the end of the seasonal rush only the most capable, mostly women, out of 270 temporary clerical employees were retained. The introduction of complicated and expensive statistical and accounting machinery such as the Hollerith machine by the Victorian Statistician's office resulted in a machine pool of young female temporary employment. The


29 Age, 26 November 1912.
1921 census was the first which was automatically tabulated using Hollereith machines. Hollereith machines were punch card machines invented by Dr. H. Hollereith, a United States statistician, to process the 1890 census data. Hollereith processing was the most advanced pre-computer technology and was manufactured by a company which became the International Business Machine Corporation (IBM). In Victoria, 57 girls and young women aged 14 to 18, who showed aptitude in a practical test were employed to operate the card punching and verifying machines.30

Other federal departments followed suit. The Post Office had priorities of 'simplification of accounting processes and the elimination of manual fingering work'. Punch-card methods for costing were first introduced in the Melbourne office during 1936 as was the installation of up-to-date billing for the preparation of telephone accounts.31 The Post Office personnel branch from 1936 was charged with monitoring and facilitating the introduction of modern office methods and mechanical aids.

Shop systems also supported large groups of women working machines. Here again, mechanization and 'scientific management systems' were constantly being updated. Cashier systems had been introduced into Victorian stores around the turn of the century. They had been aerial wire systems which had a limited capacity. Ball and Welch had introduced "American methods" of control at about the time it introduced its tube system, which, it was claimed, reduced Victorian shop assistants to "a state of absolute profit-secreting automatism" in 1900.32 More intricate tube systems were devised, however. Bright and Hitchcocks, the largest drapery shop in

30 Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1921, Census Report, p. 27.
32 Tocsin, 23 August 1900, p. 5.
Geelong, was one of three businesses in Victoria to have installed a Lampson 'Pneumatic Control System' by 1923. On a Friday night

Everybody wishes to buy something and each counter is beset with enquiries. But you do not see the sale staff rushing hither and thither for change, for receipts or calling out that hideous war-cry so well known in some small shops-"sign please"...33

Shopwalkers directed people and every salesperson used the tube system or one of 25 internal phone lines to contact the cash desk, the office or another department. 22 women in Myer tube room, for example, handled as many as 32000 transactions in a "busy day". More intricate personnel control systems were devised, also.34 Coles established a personnel department and policy from 1929. The seven-man Committee of Management included a shop inspector and a personnel manager, Mr G.H. McQuie. McQuie visited America in 1929 to investigate staff management in the leading American chain and department stores, F. W. Woolworths, Kresge and McCory's, J. C. Penny and A. and P. Grocery Stores. He proposed implementing some of their methods.35

Feminization without machines?
The relationship between feminization and machines can be overestimated. Women machinists made up less than half (46%) of all women bookkeepers, clerks and machinists. Women typists and machinists made up less than a fifth (18%) of all bookkeepers, clerks and machinists.36 Shops had an even smaller proportion of machine operators.

The employment of women did not follow the same pattern as the importation of machinery. New South Wales, for example, was the destination of 56% of

33 Geelong Standard, 18 August 1923.
34 Ball and Welch Efficiency Reports, 1935, see also earlier Defalcation Files, University of Melbourne Archives (UOMA).
35 See Frances Donovan, The Saleslady, Chicago, 1929, p. 18, ff., for the 'scientific management' of New York shop assistants.
36 Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1933, Occupations of the People, Tables 18 and 19. These proportions do not include managerial staff.
the typewriter imports assessed by monetary value between 1911 and 1939. It also took 84% of adding machines imported between 1909 and 1922 and 90.7% of cash registers which arrived between 1922 and 1939. But New South Wales did not have proportionately more women shop and office workers than Victoria: it simply had a more mechanized commercial sector. Indeed, Victoria had more shop and office employees absolutely up to the end of the 1910s and after 1911 had feminization rates very similar to those in New South Wales. Imports into Australia of shop and office machines, then, were not translated directly into a feminization rate.

Most women in the public service were not young, temporary staff nor were they machine operators. In the Postmaster-General's Department in the 1930s temporary employment hovered around 20%. The total proportion of temporary and exempt public servants in 1937 was 12033 out of 41048 or 29.3%. A fifth of those temporary and exempt were 2539 female telephonists. Ironically, however, the largest office employer with the largest machine pools had one of the lowest feminization ratios. In 1933 women made up only 9.1% of public service clerks compared with nearly 50% of commercial clerks.

**Mechanization without scientific management?**

Mechanization and scientific management did not always go hand in hand. The Government offices were the largest offices and very few private sector companies bettered the government in introducing machinery or establishing personnel departments and Taylorist-inspired efficiency campaigns. The Statistician Office Hollereith machine example, of the convergence of mechanization, feminization and re-organization, was rare in Melbourne. The Statistician’s Hollereith machine was probably the only one in Victoria.

---

37 Commonwealth Statistics, Trade Imports, ABS, 1903-84/85.
38 Census of the Commonwealth, 1911, 1921 and 1933, Occupations of the People, Tables 4 and 5.
before the Second World War.39 Powers machines were more common although they involved smaller machine pools. In 1927, the Powers system of freight accountancy was introduced into the Victorian Railways Department. Previously each station-master made monthly business abstracts. Under the Powers system, daily abstracts were made with each station having a code number and commodity numbers and monthly abstractions making monthly abstractions simple quick mechanical jobs. The Powers machine room in the central railway offices processing this data was staffed by 30 women. 40 But even the incidence of Powers systems was not common.

Even in the public service, mechanization was a slow on-going process. The immediate result of the critical 1926 report was a Victorian public service Special Departmental System Committee. It supervised the introduction of "mechanical installations" in various large departments.41 There were significant obstacles to mechanization. Above all, there was little cost-accounting of clerical labour in the way advocated by Leffingwell. As the committee itself observed, the problem remained that it was difficult to "assess in terms of money the savings which have accrued" from the introduction of mechanized office systems.42

The absence of cost-accounting in Victorian offices suggests a lack of competitive pressure. It is also indicative of the small-scale commercial

39 Lowe describes the Canadian situation in Women in the Administrative Revolution, pp. 127-134. There were at least 105 Hollereith machines installed in major Canadian companies between 1910 and 1936; 37 of these were installed before 1924.

40 Commonwealth Arbitration Report (CAR), 26, 1928, pp. 701-02. Although the number of women is not stated, the NSW Powers Branch established in 1923 consisted of 28 women with Mona Attwill in charge in 1928. Transcript and Judgement of the 1928 Female Bank Officers' Case, evidence, 13 June 1928, p. 1, Archives of Business and Labour (ABL) A2/37/7.

41 The Income and Land Tax, Milk Board, Agricultural, Transport Regulation Board and Factories and Shops, the Health Department and Equity's Office. The Education Department's 10000 teacher payroll was mechanically processed in 1935.

structure. Scientific management did not pay in smaller offices. Dictaphones and comptometers were introduced in banks, for instance, but only in "some of the larger offices" and there were few of them. Ledger-posting machines saved time and labour and theoretically eliminated fraudulent clerking. In 1930, however, banks were using ledger-posting machines in their capital branches only.

Possibly it will spread to all banks, and to all large branches, although the cost of the machines (£400 to £500 each) may militate against its rapid expansion.

In banks, for example, differences in nature and pace of work to some extent corresponded with differences between head office and branch, or town and country, employment. In banking the head offices usually employed about 40% of the total staff with the rest spread over the branches. By 1911, for example, the Melbourne office of the Bank of New South Wales had 67 bank officers while the next largest was Bendigo with eight staff. The average size of the branches was only three. While the introduction of mechanical aids to large Melbourne offices was slow and uneven, smaller offices had little chance with fewer resources to mechanize or introduce Taylorist methods.

Ross' inquiry and subsequent departmental comment reveals that certainly up to latter part of the 1920s, moreover, Taylorist methods had not been implemented into Victorian public service offices as a whole. State and federal government departments exercised considerable autonomy and continued to use traditional methods in their administration. Admittedly, in the new climate of scientific management, the largest Melbourne shops and private sector offices did begin making confidential reports on employees. These were hardly substantial "systematic" assessments, however. One company's cards entailed 12 questions with a small range of answers to

43 Australasian Insurance and Banking Record, 21 November 1930, p. 950, 'Mechanisation in Banking'.
choose from. For example, managers were asked to state whether an employee was happy and contented or if a male was a prospective manager.\textsuperscript{45} Similarly, while Goldsbrough, Mort and Company kept a book record of staff noting staff appointments, resignations, and promotion and the accountant kept cards on each employee it was not until 1948 that staff were graded.\textsuperscript{46} Most record keeping on shop and office staff was not used to "speed up" work. There was not one typewriter meter recording the number of typists' strokes or line graph measuring output used in Victorian offices. There were few daily records measuring the output of clerks. Part of the incentive for employers was absent because the arbitration system prevented the introduction of commercial piecework.

Small-scale mechanization, namely the introduction of typewriters and adding machines, and feminization more typically occurred in both large and small concerns without significant control policies being implemented. The clerical staff of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company's Yarraville refinery is an example of a small-sized office which mechanized and feminized without the introduction of scientific management. The refinery was an average large factory by 1930s.\textsuperscript{47} In 1900, there were two clerks out of a workforce of 230. These two clerks had worked 12 and 14 years at the refinery and earned 96 shillings and 70 shillings weekly respectively. There were only three others at the refinery who earned a weekly rate of 70 shillings and over: the chief and second engineer and a chemist in the sulphur ammonia laboratory. These five staff were paid a salary, not wages, and were also conspicuous in having no set weekly hours like the rest of the staff. The clerical staff gradually expanded from 1909 to reach 15 out of a staff of 533 in 1939. When one of the two clerks employed in 1900 left in 1909 on a salary equivalent to 82

\textsuperscript{45} Coles, \textit{Chain Store Economics}, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{46} Goldsbrough, Mort and Company, 19 June 1925, 5 August 1925, General Manager to South Australian Manager, ABL, 2A/260.
\textsuperscript{47} Colonial Sugar Refinery Company Records, ABL, N74 25-28.
shillings weekly he was replaced by a 22 year old on a rate of 25 shillings. This employee was in turn replaced by two 17 year old youths. By 1913 there were four clerical staff on wages and hours set by the Commercial Clerks Wages Board. The first woman appointed in June 1915 was not to replace any existing clerks but to attend to the telephone. She was 15 years old, the youngest clerk employed up to that time. Her sister replaced her a year later. In 1923 a "typiste" was employed. In 1939 four women, a quarter of the clerical staff, were employed as the adding machine operator, two typists and switchboard operators and a 26 year old woman as junior office clerk. During the Second World War the number of women employed doubled but was reduced to four again for the latter 1940s. The first married woman employed in 1941 was 50 years old having re-entered the workforce after working as a typist before marriage. Mechanization and feminization occurred without rationalization in the scientific management sense.

Most Feminizing Victorian Workplaces Not Rationalized Factories?

Was the small-sized Yarraville refinery office typical of Victorian commercial workplaces? It is difficult to establish the typical-sized workplace for there have been no surveys of business by size until recently: surveys of small business date from the beginning of the 1970s. Small business is generally regarded as a business in which one person makes all the decisions without assistance from personnel or technical employees. For official Victorian empirical purposes, since the 1970s, small business has been defined as "manufacturing enterprises employing less than one hundred people and all other enterprises employing less than twenty people" while an

enterprise was defined as "all the operations of a single operating entity". It is estimated, using Australian Bureau of Statistics data, that 2% of businesses employed 45% of all Victorian employees in 1985, above the national average of 38%. The small business sector, however, was still an important component in Victoria employing 32%, a third, of all employees. Private sector small business was larger than the public sector which employed the remaining 23% of employees. Disaggregation by industry showed 66% of all manufacturing and 43% of all wholesale and retail enterprises employed 200 or more people. Such definitions of small business and data on the contemporary situation put the historical development of shop and office enterprise and employment in Victoria in perspective. In the interwar period while big business was developing, the majority of Victorian shop and office employees worked in small shops and offices not at the forefront of scientific management.

The aggregate number of Victorian factory clerical labour, for example, grew particularly from the 1930s. The office staff grew relative to the number of managers and overseers. The official data collected by the Chief Inspector of Factories gives the general proportion of white collar labour in relation to all factory labour. In 1903, 118 factories, employed more than 100 workers; that is, 2.8% of factories employed 33% of all factory labour. In 1928-9, 260 factories employed more than 100 workers; that is 3% of factories employed 43% of factory labour. In 1938 to 1939, 366 factories employed more than 100 workers; that is only 4% of factories employed 49% of factory labour. The 245 largest factories in Victoria in 1932-33 which employed 44% of all factory labour averaged 12 accountants and clerks, a clerical workforce of


50 Victorian Year Books, (VYBs), from 1896 under the heading "Production".
4.8% in each factory. This average had been constant from June 1927. By 1938 to 1939, the 366 factories employing over 100 employees had an average office staff of 15. By the 1930s, there were only a handful of large manufacturers in Victoria which had offices of 100 or more workers. Four of the largest factories in 1930 were MacRobertsons and H. V. McKay, Swallow and Ariell and Kodak. Manufacturing was unconcentrated before World War Two. The average Victorian factory had 20 workers in 1930 and perhaps one clerk.

The same duality was developing in retailing. In 1940, the Victorian Government statistician published an index of retail employment based on monthly returns of the 102 largest retail stores in Victoria for the previous seven years. These stores grew from an average of 209 employees in 1935 to 240 in 1939. On the basis of the Chief Inspector of Factories' returns, that means the remaining 13591 shops employed on average 1.5 employees in 1935 and the 14837 shops employed 1.7 employees in 1939. The point is that the small shop persisted alongside the large department stores.

The retail sector retained a high proportion of familial units of employment well into the twentieth century. Indeed, according to the annual reports on retail employment compiled by the Chief Inspector of Factories and Shops, the number of employers and their children working in shops increased by 41% between 1930 and 1939. The number of paid shop and office employees grew by only 27% in the same period, as indicated in Graph 6-3. The number of shops increased 11% in the same period to reach a peak of 41252 which was not reached again by 1953 when the returns were no longer published.

---

51 'Victorian Industries' Supplement to the Argus, 9 September 1926 and a series on 'Romance of Industries', Saturdays, 22 January-31 May 1930. These factories had 2000, 2000, 1500 and 1000 employees, respectively.
53 VYB, 1938-39.
1939 familial retailing involved 40115 employers and their children, or on average 1.5 people in 26415 shops, compared to 49805 paid employees, or an average of 3.3 assistants in 14 837 retail shops. In other words, at least 45% of retailing labour still fitted the pattern of the 1880s. No mention is made of wives in the former, so it is probable that familial retailing rivalled staffed shops in the total labour involved.

Graph 6-3: Retail Labour in Victorian Shops, 1930-39
Source: Chief Inspector of Factories and Shops Reports, VPP

In 1939, the number of shops without paid assistants was 26415 so there were at least 26415 self-employed in the retail sector in Victoria in 1939 or 35% of the total employers and employed were self-employed. The comparable proportion of self-employed in 1930 was 40%. Unfortunately the data was only collected during the 1930s. Clearly, the chances of a shop assistant becoming an independent retailer were declining.

54 Chief Inspector of Factories and Shops' Report (CIFR), 1938, VPP, 1939.
55 When Coles profits were announced the Catholic Worker, complained about the "loss of independence for the small man", 2 September and 5 October 1940. The proportion in Victoria in 1930 was comparable to what it had been in Germany in 1905 and the United States in 1920, Jurgen Kocka, White-Collar in America 1890-1940, London, 1980, pp. 87-88.
The important distinction for shop assistants, however, was small business and big business. The occupational distribution was becoming pluralist, then and it has continued to be pluralist. Most shop assistants and clerks in Victoria before 1939 were employed in small shops and offices which were mechanizing and feminizing at the same time as larger offices. The important motivation to mechanize and rationalize which flowed from economies of scale was lacking. The Taylorist rhetoric was mere rhetoric, essentially unimplemented in either big or small Victorian business.

6.3 Welfarism Humanizing Rationalization?
While scientific management was not a widespread management strategy in Victoria, was, alternatively, welfarism? Gail Reekie, for example, has suggested that employers in large Sydney shops maintained their control over large numbers of young women by being innovators in welfare work. Welfarism combatted unionism and deterred reformers from meddling in shop employees' work conditions. Welfarism induced white collar workers to perform the proverbial fair days' work without complaint.

There are well-documented examples of welfarism in Victoria. Large shops and offices consolidated their reputations as good employers with relatively good conditions of employment. Spencer Nall, Chairman of Directors and manager of Bright and Hitchcocks, for example, told a staff dinner in 1927 at which he was guest of honour of his belief that

the era of the big department store was breaking, but in the development and management of them the most scientific treatment was necessary...He had a vision of its possibilities. He had a vision of a department store, ever growing each year, where the staff would work under the best conditions, serving thousands of people, and behind which was the idea of service.

---

58 Geelong Advertiser. 26 August 1927.
A social committee and a welfare committee had been formed, commissions and bonuses to staff had been instituted and staff share holding had been increased. Nall headed a group of five senior employees who had bought out Howard Hitchcock in 1926. Similarly, by the 1930s, in addition to 'unofficial' groups with traditional employees origins, Myer's management funded a number of social clubs. The department stores and the large factory offices all had medical facilities and welfare officers:

Should Miss Ford come to work with a headache, or press a finger too zealously upon the keyboard, or feel a funny feeling coming over her all of a sudden, she promptly forgets her work and visits the welfare staff.

Banks offered special "privileges and benefits" in the form of superannuation, bonuses, and special interest rates to the rank and file by the 1930s. They had a long genesis. The Bank of Australasia had introduced a non-contributory pension fund for certain employees in 1842 which was considered most progressive. In 1887 special staff interest rates and deposit terms were introduced. In 1910, the Bank of Australasia led the way in introducing a fully subsidized provident fund. It had previously donated large sums to the employees’ fund from time to time. Employees’ contributions at a rate of three and a half percent of their salaries were matched pound for pound by the bank. By 1924, only "one or two" of the 11 banks operating in Victoria had yet to establish provident funds. While the Bank of Australasia reduced salaries by 10% in 1895, it restored them in stages by 1900 and issued a 10% "coronation bonus" in 1902, 10% bonuses in 1907, 1908, 1912, 1913, a 5% war work bonuses in 1915, 10% in 1917 and 1918 and 15% in 1920. A 10% reduction in 1931 was restored and a 7 1/2% "centenary" bonus was distributed in 1935.

---

59 Myer Store News, 28 August 1937, Picnic, Christian Fellowship, Cricket and Football, Staff Men’s, Choir, Theatrical and Girls Basketball societies.
60 Geelong Standard, 7 October 1927.
61 ANZ Banking Group Archives, ABL 173, AAL 113, AB346. See also, for example, State Bank of Victoria, series 352, Provident Fund Rules and Reports, 1923-1939.
The more valued the staff, the more they received. The provision of a bonus on the basis of business performance was common, but these bonuses were usually restricted to certain employees in terms of status or service. When Hitchcock sold his business in 1926, for example, he gave £5000 in preference shares to "the staff", or rather the heads of the departments, heads of sections and members of staff who had served fifteen years or more which only amounted to about 30 staff out of 160 in July 1926. As Reekie has pointed out, most importantly welfarism was hierarchical. Bank branch managers' free housing and the Myer executive's library differentiated a primary labour force from a secondary labour force.

Banks, stores and offices bestowed this largesse on the clear understanding that their generosity left the recipients with certain obligations. Above all, the in-house company journals make this clear. The Myer Emporium Limited Store Bulletin and Colesanco dated from 1928, the Mutual store produced a weekly message for its staff from 1934. The aim of Foy and Gibson's Service begun in 1936 was typical: "to maintain the unity of Outlook and Coordination of Effort". Welfarism combated trade unionism. Melbourne managers were aware of this. The manager of the Scottish James Templeton and Co., for instance, wrote openly to Foy and Gibson's manager in 1930 sharing his firm's experience of the benefits employers reaped from welfare provisions. Nearly all their employees were trade union members in 1919, but three-quarters were not by 1930.

Welfarism did humanize rationalization as Reekie suggested. Welfarism was obviously as popular a movement in Melbourne in the 1920s and 1930s as was scientific management. That is, the same question that was asked of scientific management must be asked of welfarism. How extensive was it?

For its part, all the staff contributed towards the installation of a "wireless set" for Hitchcock.

Foy and Gibson Letterbook, 8 August 1930.
The nature and extent of welfarism in Australia was an issue which F. R. E. Mauldon, senior lecturer in economics at the University of Melbourne, addressed in 1933. For the purposes of his survey, he divided welfare provisions into two categories, direct and indirect money contributions. Direct money contributions were:

- rewards for suggestions, subsidies to provident, distress, sick and accident funds, subsidies to home purchasers investments, savings bank deposits, life insurance, pensions and superannuation funds, bonus payments and the division of net business earnings represented in profit-sharing, co-partnership, and share distribution and share purchase plans.64

There was no data to quantify the extent of direct welfare measures. Mauldon itemized indirect money contributions as follows:

- provision of welfare staffs (with or without the feature of co-operative councils and/or works committee), special amenities in the working environment, amply equipped dining, lunch, recreation, and rest rooms, and halls (with or without subsidized meal services) medical and dental facilities, educational and library services, subsidized or assisted clubs and institutes, house magazines, facilities for low rental housing, community centres, recreation grounds, parks and playgrounds, holiday resorts and holiday schemes, and co-operative or company stores.65

The number of businesses providing indirect welfare measures was very small: 76 establishments besides Government departments. However, a third of these were large concerns employing over 1000 employees and this boosted the total number of employees in the 76 establishments to 40000. There were 42942 public servants in the 1933 census. Mauldon was suggesting that 3% of the 2743805 Australian employees in 1933 worked in workplaces with established measurable welfare provisions.

Mauldon stressed the importance of the size and nature of the business unit as the determining factor in the provision of welfare schemes. 12 or 13 of the largest companies were retail stores and manufacturing establishments which were of course characterized by a female labour force. The first welfare

---

65 ibid.
providers were the department stores which were also clothing factories such as Myer's and Foy and Gibson's. The Factories and Shops Act prohibited eating meals in workrooms or shops. This promoted the establishment of dining room facilities which was by far the most frequent provision. The most comprehensive schemes, however, providing for the greater number of employees were in "sugar refinery, metalliferous mining and smelting, and agricultural machinery undertakings".

The implications of workplace size and employer welfare innovation have been hinted at by some Australian historians but not fully drawn out. Gail Reekie's study of Sydney's big stores' labour relations concluded that there was a difference in the Australian development in shop control compared with that in America.66 In America bureaucratized managements had already developed before a strategy of welfare measures was adopted. Australian shop welfarism was not part of Taylorist innovation in the 1920s but evolved gradually out of a liberal, paternal, nineteenth century environment. Margaret Cuthbertson did not regard it as a new departure when she took up her position in 1920 as Welfare Officer for Myer's, the largest Melbourne emporium. She regarded her shop welfare work as merely the proper development of her work with women as an Inspector of Factories and Shops, a position she held from 1894 to 1920. This gradualism undermines any association of the 1920s and 1930s with the sudden imposition of a reign of management terror.

Mauldon also argued that the extent of welfarism was limited in Australia because of the operation of the arbitration system. Workers had little sentiment for employers while employers had little desire to institute patronage under a wage system which standardized conditions. There was an absence of co-operative councils or 'whitleyism' in Australia which

accompanied welfare provisions overseas. Only two companies, the Broken Hill Associated Smelters Pty and the Electrolytic Zinc Company of Australasia had established co-operative councils along the British model. The question of whether the arbitration system standardized workers and prevented employers from distinguishing between workers is more problematic. In the second half of this chapter I shall consider two points: whether arbitration standardized conditions—did employers and workers seek standard conditions; and were there any methods other than scientific management, welfarism and arbitration that employers used to distinguish between workers.

6.4 Negotiations With Workers Upset Well-Laid Rationalization Plans?

Shop and office employers like other employers, attempted to impose control, avoid unionism and make profits. It is usually argued that large employers managed to achieve all three through increasing the scale of production, mechanization and welfarism. The workforce was consequently stratified with a low level of machine minders and an elite rewarded with above award benefits. It has been established, however, that the majority of employees in Victoria before 1939 did not work for large stores and offices. Although some did, most employees did not experience scientific management or welfarism. Most employees were working increasingly with machines and were under award wages and conditions. Small shop and office employers did not avoid unionism: indeed, Victoria’s wages board system ensured the survival of shop and office unionism.

Was arbitration simply another way to achieve the results usually attributed to scientific management and welfarism? Did employers attempt to achieve an undifferentiated mass of workers through arbitration and did unionized workers resist? It is clear that unions attempted to extend the wages board and court awards so as to provide for all employees in a single hierarchical
scale with automatic progression. Employers for their part made strenuous efforts to promote a primary labour market outside arbitration.

**Increasing Margins for Male Shop and Office Workers**

Victorian white collar unions concentrated upon winning margins of pay above the basic wage in the interwar period. Such margins were awarded to occupations upon the basis of skill. They could also be awarded to groups of workers within industries. Senior white collar men were dissatisfied that there were no classifications or margins of skill for senior men. Unions sought long progressive wage scales with automatic progression for all white collar men. Insurance clerks, railway clerks, bank clerks, commercial clerks, law clerks and shop assistants all attempted to win classifications in the 1920s. They got the same response.

The insurance agreement of 1921 established the principle of scales "based on long service and careers, increasing with years of service when combined with good conduct and efficiency".\(^\text{67}\) It was agreed that insurance workers increased their knowledge and usefulness and filled increasingly responsible positions over their careers—unlike skilled tradesmen who received a common rate for adults of any age. While companies applied this principle generally, individuals outside the public service had no automatic rights to promotion beyond the basic wage. The General Secretary of the Australian Insurance Staffs' Federation, which was in effect the Victorian branch, reluctantly signed the agreement with employers in 1921 for there was no provision for senior staff salaries or officers beyond 28 years old. Managers refused to countenance a log grading or classifying senior officers, but agreed to review senior officers' salaries informally.\(^\text{68}\) In the 1923

---

\(^{67}\) Australian Insurance Staffs' Federation v. Accident Underwriters Association and Others, CAR. 19, 1924, p. 222.

\(^{68}\) Minutes of the Australian Insurance Staffs' Federation, Victorian Branch: 23 November 1920, 4 April 1921 and 1 September 1927, ABL, E98/64.
Commonwealth Arbitration case, the union attempted to get the Court to award an elongated wage scale and the classification of one-seventh of indoor staff and chief clerks as first-class officers. Senior positions of head cashiers, accountants, policy endorsement clerks, correspondent clerks, inspectors heads of departments and principal clerks received increased salaries by way of an elongated pay scale up to 18 years or 32 years of age but there was no classification beyond that point. The increments above the basic wage were not automatic but, as in the 1921 agreement depended upon the manager conceding "good conduct, diligence and efficiency". Management successfully maintained they needed this discretion in order to ensure control and discipline.

The Federation of Salaried Officers and the Railways Union had a similar experience. They made an application to the Commonwealth Arbitration Court in October 1927 for increments for a group of officers in receipt of salaries over £600. The Victorian Government had refused to grant increases to the 22 officers on whose behalf the application was made. The Court awarded increments to the 22 men, who included the advertising manager, the workshops manager, the claims agent and several superintendents. In all there were 55 salaried officers earning above £600, however. The Victorian Government would not pay increments to the 33 not covered by the 1927 award. Consequently, the Federation and the Union made higher salaries a major point of contention in their 1928 claim.

The Victorian railways employed 1973 adult clerks in 1928; male clerks were divided into a seven class scale. Clerks remained in each class until a vacancy occurred and it was their turn for promotion. On top of the seven

70 Australian Railways Union v. Victorian Railways Commissioners and Others and Federation of Salaried Officers of Railways Commissioners v. Railway Commissioners for New South Wales, CAR, 26, 1928, pp. 643-44.
classes there was a superior class consisting mainly of supervisors and above them were heads and sub-heads of branches. Mr C. W. J. Coleman, Chairman of the Clerical Classification Committee, the body classifying clerks into the classes, claimed there was a "distinct difference" in the value of the work in the classes which necessitated promotions rather than progression. The unions claimed that the demarcation between the classes was very difficult to draw and that duties and responsibilities overlapped. They sought automatic progressive annual increments for all clerks from 21 to 29 provided that their head of department certified as to their "good conduct, diligence and efficiency".\textsuperscript{71}

While the unions won an improved margin, they were unsuccessful on their progression claim. The claim for increments in the "basic wage region" for railway clerks was made on three grounds: railway officers had a position and status to maintain which was above the standard cost of living; the value of work performed by clerks warranted increments; there were not sufficient higher classed vacancies for clerks to rise to from the basic salary "within a reasonable period" although it was considered a career occupation. The first claim was thrown out of court as were the other two claims although they were treated more seriously. While the Deputy-President agreed that a clerk became more expert, knowledgeable and valuable from year to year, he simply proposed the amalgamation of the two lowest classes in the case of adult clerks. The unions claimed not only that promotion from the lower classes was too limited and differed from one branch to another, but that it was worsening. Evidence was given to show that during the war, when there were no permanent appointments, promotion was faster.

Bank clerks also made an unsuccessful claim for classification and progression for middle and higher salaried staff. Officials agreed to negotiate

\textsuperscript{71} ibid., pp. 653-4.
scales for the first time in 1920, and minimum rates based on years of service were formalized in wage tribunals. The first Commonwealth agreement was made in 1920 and another in 1922. An 18 step scale for men and an eight step scale for women was agreed to in 1922. Men occupying higher-paid positions wanted guaranteed career security like those younger officers closer to the basic wage. In 1924, the Bank Officers' Union made a claim in the Commonwealth Arbitration Court on behalf of managers and accountants in the 11 banks operating in Victoria and Tasmania. They based their proposed rates on the volume of work, the size of staff and the responsibility of chief head office positions. The Queensland Arbitration Court had agreed to set minimum salaries for all branch managers with automatic increments for the first five years of their terms of management and specific minimums for managers and accountants of "six-handed branches". The New South Wales Arbitration Court refused a similar claim in 1921 as did the South Australian Arbitration Court 1923. In 1924, the Commonwealth Arbitration Court based its decision largely on the evidence of Mr Crickmer of the Bank of Australasia. He claimed that it would be impossible to classify the 200 managers in his bank and the 588 bank managers in Victoria. Despite evidence that between 1913 and 1924 all the banks had increased managers' salaries by an average of 57%, it decided that it was improper for the Commonwealth Arbitration Court to make awards for managerial positions. Indeed, it was the constant refrain of the Court that it refused to provide for any managers or those likely to act in the absence of managers.

The Law Clerks, the commercial clerks and shop assistants were similarly unsuccessful in their attempts to win classification and automatic progression. The Clerks' Union sought a general office scale for typists and

73 ibid., 19, 1924, p. 290.
75 Argus, 29 July 1924 and 24 October 1923.
stenographers and stipulated rates for chief clerks, checkers, collectors, ledger keepers, correspondence, sales and counter clerks and a range of other clerks. They won a limited classification in 1921 only for it to be waived in 1922. They did not win even a limited classification again. Shops boards did provide for manageresses and managers of shops or head salesmen working singly, in charge of one, two, three or four persons and in charge of five or more persons. But there was no automatic progression.

While employers fought automatic progression, some shop and office workers were clearly being promoted and remunerated well. The primary male labour market was being differentiated by employers even in relatively small workplaces. "Executive" status, for instance, was defined by Goldsborough, Mort and Company from the 1920s when all salaries of £300 and under were paid weekly while salaries over £300 were paid by the calendar month. The career paths by which promising young boys became executives, however, had not hitherto been defined. Many Melbourne employers such as the Manager of Dalgety's Insurance Department, P. Cleak, thought it that it was good and character-forming for all boys to be paid little and to progress slowly. In 1928, however, the Melbourne General Manager of Goldsborough, Mort and Company suggested provisions for executive progression ought to be developed.

In common with other Companies and Institutions having a fairly large clerical staff to pick from, we consider that there should be no difficulty as regards suitable men for responsible posts, but we are nevertheless at present a good deal disturbed at the outlook, because, as a result, no doubt of logs, etc., [the pay scale] there is most observable falling off in ambition amongst the younger workers. We are not referring here particularly to this Company, of course, but speaking generally, and it behoves us to look well ahead, and if necessary, provide for the situation

76 ibid., 1 July 1924.
77 Summary of Wages and Conditions Fixed by Wages Boards, 1 January 1939: No. 1 (Boot Dealers), No. 6 (Chemists), No. 8 (Dairy Produce and Cooked Meat), No. 9 (Drapers and Men's Clothing) No. 10 (Fish and Poultry), No. 14 (Furniture), No. 15 (Grocers), No. 16 (Hardware), No. 17 (Tobacconists), No. 18 (Miscellaneous), No. 21 (Bookseller and Newsagent), No. 22 (Motor Requisites), No. 23 (Educational and Radio Goods).
by a more organized system of trying out and giving experience and opportunities to those most likely to benefit.  

The depression intervened, however. Management again became concerned by the loss of 14 promising young juniors between January 1936 and 1937 from their Melbourne office, juniors who left despite the care taken "to select a good type of youth". All these junior clerks had a high school education and had obtained at least the Intermediate Certificate. Ten were from the 'best' schools in Melbourne: four from Melbourne High School, three from Scotch College and three from Wesley College. All were sons of successful businessmen or were sponsored by successful businessmen. Their fathers, or stepfathers, included the Director of Education, Accountants of the City Council, Treasurers' and Government Audit offices, a dentist, a State Savings Bank manager, a shirt manufacturer, two estate agents and a grain broker. Two were recommended by the Commissioner of the County Roads' Board and Dalgety's accountant. They had left Goldsbrough, Mort and Company because they were dissatisfied with promotion prospects. The company decided to pay above-award rates to promising young men in the hope that they would stay and permit the management to "build up and maintain a competent staff". By 1939, then, formal internal labour markets had begun to be established for groups of male employees in Melbourne commerce outside the arbitration ambit.

Classification of Women

Women workers found few champions in the attempt to establish a skill hierarchy. Indeed, the reverse was true. In most shop and office workers' cases before the industrial tribunals in the 1920s, union advocates sought to establish the lack of skill, prospects and variation in women's work.

79 Goldsbrough, Mort and Company, W. A. Gibson to K. de L. Cudmore, General Manager, Melbourne to Sydney Manager, 1 February 1928, ABL, 2A/223/2.
80 Goldsbrough, Mort and Company, Memorandum to the General Manager, 18 March 1937, ABL, 2A/240 D, Staff memos re-salaries.
Female clerks were not a priority of white collar unions in the interwar period. The Secretary of the Victorian branch of the Insurance Staffs' Federation delivered a report in 1924 proposing "that a vigorous campaign should now be entered upon to assert the rights of members who had been neglected". The proposal that "the claims of the Lady members and the seniors should receive immediate attention" was unanimously carried. Lady members' meetings were held during 1924. While the wages of women were regarded as "totally inadequate for the class of work they were performing", the Federation did not seek equal pay. Instead, special increases for women averaging 16% were sought by compressing the nine step wage scale to eight and increasing the starting rate. The maximum salary remained the same at £180. An equal pay proposal put forward by the 'ladies' was adopted in 1926 and female representation at conference talks with employers was granted. The only other concession for women was recognition of previous commercial experience for typists and stenographers. The rights of senior male officers were more assiduously pursued. Indeed, the Bank Officers' Association was formed in 1919, but women were precluded from membership until 1937.

Clerking and shop assisting were occupations in which men and women worked side by side in the interwar period. Men as well as women performed routine clerical labour:

The general or great mass of insurance employees are engaged in work of a routine, regular, stereotyped character which, whilst not requiring skill in the sense of a mechanic or an artist, requires more than ordinary training, care, intelligence, constant attention, and machine-like precision. Only a limited number of officers exercise real discretionary

---

81 Minutes of the Australian Insurance Staffs' Federation, Victorian Branch, 7 July 1924, ABL, E98/64.
82 ibid., Report on Lady Members and Life Assurance Companies, 27 April 1925.
83 ibid., Conference with the managers over female rates 12 July 1924.
84 ibid., 4 October 1926 and 5 September 1927.
powers, but most may be reasonably expected to exercise advisory functions when necessary....

Similarly, clerks in the 7th class in the Railway Service performed basic labour:

...in Victoria the junior clerks are supposed, in law, to perform part of the general mass of the work of the 7th Class clerks, although, as a matter of common sense as well as actual practice, they commence their railway service with the performance of elementary duties for the purpose of gaining training and experience before they are entrusted with the higher functions, which naturally belong to adult men in the 7th class. Various statements of duties put in during the hearing seem to show that junior clerks in Victoria are generally employed on such work as shorthand writing and typing; sorting, checking, and recording correspondence; attending to small telephone switchboards; and operating adding machines.

In addition to 7th class clerks, was the category of daily paid adult railway clerks. This class was introduced to perform routine clerical work. In 1923, several hundred were given the opportunity of passing an examination to transfer to salaried positions. 124 daily paid clerks were not considered suitable as permanent clerks. They represented 6% of adult clerks. Women, however, were classified as uniformly routine workers.

In the 1920s, the Victorian branch of the Administrative and Clerical Officers' Association was one of the few unions to consider seriously the legal position of lower classifications for females performing the same work as men. Miss Bolger unsuccessfully appealed over her classification in 1924. The union's leaders admitted that there were comparatively few women in the service but they wanted to establish the general principle that the value of the work performed should determine wages and not the characteristics of the person performing the work. The High Council obtained a legal opinion as to whether the Public Service Board's practice of classifying public servants on the basis of sex discrimination was ultra vires of the Commonwealth Public

87 Administrative and Clerical Officers' Association, Executive Minutes, 28 April 1925, ABL, A12/2/343.
Service Act 1922, sections 7 and 27(1) which empowered the Board to classify officers on the basis of the "importance and character of the work performed". The Board had issued regulations that all women would receive less than a man performing the same work whatever position they held. The High Council discovered that it was going to cost at least £150 to apply for a writ of mandamus against the Public Service Board and among the 'difficulties' raised by the solicitors there was doubt whether the approval of female salaries by the Governor General precluded a case against the Board.

While unions did not dispute the lower classification of women doing the same work as men, there is also evidence that women were not constrained to routine jobs, despite their overall designation as routine workers. Banking is a good example. Any woman employed after 1 September 1920 in a bank who was not employed in minor clerical duties—which were defined as "typing, shorthand, indexing, sorting, filing, recording, branch remittances, current account or tellers' cash books or slips, perusal or dealing with branch returns, or the working of any mechanical appliances"—were to receive equal pay with their male counterparts.88 The banks avoided the equal pay clause simply by classifying women clerks as typists.89 But women were not restricted to minor clerical duties or typing.

Banks had employed a group of women with temporary status during the First World War, particularly for ledger work, on agreements which were terminable on a month's notice from either side. The continued expansion of banks and the mechanization of ledgerkeeping, particularly in the metropolis, were the rationale for maintaining a group of women after the end of the war. The continued employment of women on manual ledgerkeeping in country branches after the war, however, was considered a problem. These jobs were

---

264

used as male training positions and women clogged up the process because they could not be promoted and lessened the number of male training positions. Moreover, it had not been intended that women in town or country make banking a career. It was presumed that women would marry and leave their routine jobs. In 1921, Judge Rolin confirmed women's ruling rates and a scale with a minimum for entering at age 19 to a maximum at 25 which was also regarded as the prevailing practice. He confirmed the classification, despite ledger work being neither minor clerical duties or typing.

The transcripts of the 1928 New South Wales female bank officers' case survive which show that some women were doing more responsible work than ledgers. The Bank of New South Wales' representative gave evidence that between 1920 and 1928 there had been a 50% turnover in women staff compared to a 20% turnover in male staff. Of the 92 women who had left, 60% stated categorically that they were leaving to marry while the remaining 40% did not give their reasons. Indeed, it was said that 10% of girls leaving the Commercial Bank left to marry Commercial Bank men. The average length of service in the Commercial Bank was said to be 4.1 years and in the Bank of New South Wales 5.9 years. The officials stressed that women were not required to have pre-requisite qualifications, received no training on-the-job and held no responsible positions. The problem was that women did the same jobs which boys performed in their promotion climb:

...the same type of work now day after day...transactions with different people, but the same sort of transactions are repeated day to day.90

Judge Piddington found that, while the usual age for recruitment had dropped to 17 and most women left by age 25 to marry, a group of capable

women were not leaving their jobs but were making banking a career.\textsuperscript{91} In head offices there was a group of women who had records of lengthy service usually more than ten years and had reached 'maximum efficiency' in their jobs but who had no promotion prospects. Most, nonetheless, intended staying on in their jobs. Jessie Burnett with 12 years service was "happy" in her work stating that "It is essential for me to have a job".\textsuperscript{92} At the discretion of banks, these women were given increments above the maximum on the scale and earned between £200 and £250. Although they had not reached management positions, the banks tended not to restrict these women to routine, mechanical and less important positions. They performed the hardest 'routine work' and their experience allowed them to be relieving workers for the whole range of head office jobs. The banks wanted a group of women who would be interchangeable. It was established that it took "at least five or six years" before a reliever could perform the range of positions.

Although valuing the "bright" women recruited during the war, the bank officials were opposed to the small group of "particularly bright women" should elongate and enhance the female pay scale. The Judge recognized that women went beyond the 'rank and file' and were paid salaries appropriate to their more responsible positions. He did not agree that this should influence the scale, however. The pay scale which was issued was elongated slightly in comparison to what existed before 1928. The female bank officers' pay scale was in line with other female scales such as the female staff of the City Council. Unofficially, bank officials acknowledged that they relaxed their opposition to women's progression during the 1930s.\textsuperscript{93} While less than 5% of women were earning more than £260 in 1933, the jobs they were

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{91} ibid., Judgement of Full Bench, delivered by Piddington, J., 21 September 1928, pp. 3-7, A2/37/2. See also, Mona and Marie Attwill's evidence, 13 June 1928, pp. 1-10, A2/37/7. 12% of the 163 women in the NSW railways department in 1928 in a special senior grade.
\textsuperscript{92} ibid., Jessie Burnett's evidence, 6 June 1928, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{93} Australasian Insurance and Banking Record, 22 August 1938.
employed upon were not always as constrained as their wages. Classifications did not necessarily reflect skill levels.

Admittedly unions were successful in establishing short relatively undifferentiated women's classification and unsuccessful in attempts to establish pay scales for men into the upper echelons. Not all men working in shops and offices were destined for the upper echelon jobs nor were women an undifferentiated group working in machine pools.

6.5 Depression: divisions among the secondary labour market

Two developments in the interwar period contributed to differentiation within the female secondary labour market. First, the commercial 'career girl' emerged and employers found they had to provide conditions of employment to motivate these single women. Secondly, the bimodal pattern of women's labour market participation began. Employers found an increasing number of older, married women were prepared to work. Unions attempted to prevent the employment of this new segment of labour.

'Career Girls'

A career for women in business was commonly referred to by the 1920s and 1930s. It was not simply that the proportion of women in business over 25 rose slightly. The number of women gaining responsible positions rose slightly and the female private secretary emerged. The best paid female positions in Melbourne in 1930 other than professional women were said to be teachers, factory forewomen and shop and office staff. Women secretaries and accountants could earn more than teachers, "probably the best paid

---

94 See, for example, Helen's Weekly, 1/4, 29 September 1927, 'Helen's Business Woman's Number', and Woman's Weekly, series on women's careers, 1933.
secretary in Melbourne has £600 a year". The only women earning over £1000 salary were the "skilled buyers for the large draperies".95

First, the members of the Professional and Business Woman's Association founded in Melbourne in 1925 included the well-paid store buyers, banking and mercantile executives. Nell Martyn was the first president. Her father owned a steelworks and finally gave in to her pleas to be able to join the firm. He discovered later she was able to manage the works in his absence in addition to doing the typing and shorthand.96 There are other isolated success stories: Mrs Sylvia Bubeck, became staff director, and Miss P. Small, became secretary and then director, of Oliver Gilpin company in the 1930s.97 Margaret Cuthbertson, the Myer welfare officer, was a prominent member and undoubtedly encouraged the women buyers to attend. Such women included Ella McDonald, Myer's artificial jewellery buyer and Miss Dixie Beaumont, George's store shoe buyer.98 Mrs Ethel Ward was buyer for babies and children's wear as early as 1907 before joining Foy and Gibson's store in 1937.99 The most successful female buyer in Melbourne before 1939 was Miss Adeline Keating, Myer's international toy department buyer.100 Other successful business women in shops included Miss D. Fryer, the first woman out of 17 Head Office Coles' buying staff and Miss Grant, in charge of the correspondence department.101 Miss Ruth Lawson was promotion manager and Reta Findlay was advertising manager for George's.102

95 Shop Assistant, 20 June 1922. Argus, 9 January 1930.
97 Herald, 14 December 1939.
99 Service, June/July 1957.
101 Colesanco, 5/25, October 1932.
The female secretary was more numerous than successful store women. In the 1933 census, typists, stenographers, office machinists were differentiated from secretaries. There were 38921 female typists, stenographers, office machinists and 1845 female secretaries (compared to 134 and 3889 men respectively). The majority of the 84075 women office staff in Australia listed were under 25 (60%) but 67% of the typists/machinists were under 25 and only 20% of the secretaries. By 1947, women secretaries were more common than male secretaries. There were 78369 typists/machinists and 7423 female secretaries (compared to 337 and 4694 men) of whom 74% and 35% were under 25 respectively. Secretaries were paid more and had more status, as one of my informants remembered:

All the girls there were employed as typists. We were never called secretaries. I did hear of secretaries but I think they were mostly men, and the word implied a much more responsible job than a typist’s.103

Secretarial work was increasingly portrayed as what the successful business girls should aim for from the 1920s.104

Married Women’s Competition?
The majority of working women from 1880 to 1939 were single. Indeed, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was the era of the young single working woman. An exact rate cannot be obtained from census data before 1891, but 45% of women aged 15 to 24 were in paid employment in 1891. By 1933 and 1947, the rates were 58% and 61%, respectively, or approximately three-fifths. The proportion of women aged 15 to 24 in the age structure was dropping between 1891 and 1933 which makes the small rise in the proportion of women breadwinners aged 15 to 24 more significant. The official stereotype of the woman in full-time employment was certainly of a young fully employed single woman.

103 Dorothy Greenhill (pseudonym), Work History, paid employment from 1934.
White collar work, especially office work, had a low proportion of married women in the interwar period. The census of 1933 shows that married women made up 11.3% of women in waged employment, 13.7% of women in commerce and finance— which included shop assistants— and a mere 4% of women engaged in public administration, professional and clerical occupations.\(^{105}\) While 80% of those in the workforce had never married, 94% of women in public administration, professional and clerical occupations had never married.\(^{106}\) By 1947, 20% of women in waged employment were married.\(^ {107}\) The question of how a woman could or should marry and sustain a business career was widely discussed in the interwar period. The advice given was that "women in offices are usually single" and those who wanted to be successful had to remain unmarried.\(^{108}\)

Shops and offices officially had a low proportion of part-time and seasonal employees. The first extensive survey of part-time employment was not made until the 1933 census.\(^{109}\) Part-time employment data was collated by 'dependent children, income, industry in conjunction with age and conjugal condition, and occupation in conjunction with age'. 8% of wage-earning men and 5.5% of wage-earning women were employed part-time in Victoria compared to 9% and 5% nationally. Most of the women in part-time employment were urban, 75% were in Melbourne. Part-time employment in Victorian commerce was not extensive in 1933; only 4% of both male and female. 60% of the women in part-time commercial work were 24 and under and 89% had never married. Only 11% were married, widowed and divorced and 5% had dependent children.

\(^{105}\) 6% of female clerks were married in official statistics in 1910, Grace Coyle, 'Women in the Clerical Occupations', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 143, 1929, p. 138.

\(^{106}\) *Census of the Commonwealth*, 1933, Occupations of the People.

\(^{107}\) Ibid., 1947, Occupations of the People.

\(^{108}\) See, for example, *Argus*: 31 July and 4 August 1926; 20 June 1928; 9 January 1930.

Most of the part-time commercial workers in 1933 were young, single women. During the depression work was rationed and redistributed in shops and office. George's not only cut all wages by 20% but younger members without dependants were put onto part-time work. Sometimes those in employment worked longer hours. As one employer wrote,

I would just like to say how well the girls have worked during the year, and especially so when we were having such a strenuous time, they all thought of ways and means to help, and made very clever and practical suggestions, several of them arrived at 8 o'clock and did two lots of filing before beginning the day and stayed late at night, and were all so bright, willing and intelligent.110

The common belief that during the depression was that the 'bachelor girl' in employment kept the 'money spinning'.111

Commerce continued to expand. During the 1930s the seasonal pulses of casual labour grew stronger as the economy recovered from the depression, as Graph 6-4 shows using data collected from shops employing half the total number of shop assistants. In addition to seasonal labour, part-time labour probably recovered. While prohibited for other wages boards, the Shops and Factories Act permitted pro rata wages in shops from 1909.112

---

110 Bi-Annual Reports on the Work Done by the Lady Staff, Elders, 31 December 1931, ABL, Z220/1 90.
111 Woman's Weekly, 9 September 1934.
The stage seemed set for the employment of older, married women working more flexible working hours. The census data on the Victorian age structure clearly shows an increase in the proportion of older women in Victoria by the 1930s. In 1881, 63% of the Victorian female population was under 25. By 1933, only 42% of the Victorian female population was under 25. The proportion over 45 had doubled from 14% to 28% between 1881 and 1933. By the late 1930s the rate of married women in paid employment had begun to rise and to dilute the predominance of the young single woman wage earner.

Christabel Young examining Australian female birth cohorts and paid labour participation shows two trends developing in the interwar period: a shorter pre-marriage stint in the labour force and married women's increased participation.
participation. The combined effect of an older median age at leaving school and a younger median age at marriage resulted in a potential pre-marriage work career dropping from 13 years in 1880 to 5.8 years in 1940. The proportion of married women working after marriage and before the birth of their first child rose from 20% of the 1920 birth cohort to 80% of the 1940 birth cohort. At the same time the age of re-entering the workforce post-children dropped at the turn of the century. The age dropped at the turn of the century but only became significant in the 1930s. A bimodal pattern of labour market participation for women developed from 1929: women left the workforce to rear children but returned at a later stage. As more single women worked in shops and offices, one would expect more married women to seek to return to those occupations in which they were experienced when they returned to waged employment.

The union movement was opposed to casual or married women's labour. The Victorian Shop Assistants' Union increased its agitation for earlier closing, a strict 40 hour working week and against casual labour during the depression. The secretary declared the vast majority of casuals were not in real need of money they earn and I estimate that ... one full-time employee [could be employed for] every 5 casuals.

Increased unemployment and new work practices saw shop and office unions turn on married women. The Victorian Trades Hall Council stated its policy in relation to unemployed married men in 1926. Married women with husbands in regular employment should not be in the paid workforce; their husbands were disloyal unionists. Similarly, the Shop Assistants' Union publicly

objected to married women being employed as manageresses and shop assistants.\textsuperscript{117} In November 1930, the union began its campaign against married women's employment by publicly naming companies employing married women and the women involved, particularly if they were manageresses.\textsuperscript{118} When the question was raised over the eligibility of married women to be trade union members, it was decided that the membership of any woman who married would automatically cease but that if she continued or re-entered the trade after her marriage she could make an application for renewed membership which would be considered case by case.\textsuperscript{119}

In the 1933 census while 17\% of men were registered not at work there were 11\% of women similarly registered. Competition for jobs was of course at a premium. Women were competing with women. There were sufficient unemployed typists by 1929 for the Young Women's Christian Association to organize a shorthand typing class to help girls keep up their typing and shorthand speeds while unemployed. In 1928, the Bank of New South Wales was receiving dozens of applications. These were filed in alphabetical order in a 'dead record' because it was bank policy to appoint relatives of staff.\textsuperscript{120} 600 females sat a test for 4 places in the Railways Departments in May 1933.\textsuperscript{121}

Age groups as well as the sexes competed for employment. Unfortunately the occupational census data is not disaggregated by ages for individual states for 1921 and 1933 nor does it not establish the immediate prewar trend. In the absence of better data, Table 6-1 shows commercial employers resorted to younger male bank staff during the depression. At the same time,

\textsuperscript{117} Argus. 15 November 1930.
\textsuperscript{118} Shop Assistants' Union, Minutes, 11 November 1930, ABL, T21.
\textsuperscript{119} ibid., 20 February 1936.
\textsuperscript{120} Female Bank Officers' Case, 1928, Robert Broad's evidence, 19 June 1928, pp. 4-5, A2/37/9.
\textsuperscript{121} Sun. 2 May 1933.
progression became easier for some males and the proportion of male managers grew. Older women, however, might not be dismissed in order to make way for younger, cheaper female labour.

Table 6-1: Age Structure of Banking Staff, Australia, 1921-1947

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1921</th>
<th>1933</th>
<th>1947</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male Managers</td>
<td>Male Clerks</td>
<td>Female Clerks</td>
<td>Male Managers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-14</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-49</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-54</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-59</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Banks such as English, Scottish and Australian Chartered employed only senior women recruited from good jobs during and immediately after World War One. Then they began employing younger girls and training them. They found, however, that they had a shortage of experienced staff. They began employing experienced married women such as Mrs Mabel Fyfe. Fyfe had ten years business experience before leaving the workforce to bring up a family. In 1927 the National Bank accountant approached her to go back to work. She explained her situation in evidence before the Industrial Commission:

Q. Do you keep the house going, or contribute? A. I do; most of my salary goes pooled in the house for the house. I have two sons. Their father just gets the living wage, and that is why I started. They could not get a ledgerkeeper in the bank and asked me to come in. My two sons and my husband are in the home now. They [My sons] are not earning money. One is learning accountancy and one wool-classing. My husband is in the Water and Sewerage Board. They told me that they would not ask me any personal questions up here. It is a private business which one does not tell, as to his income. There are my

---

122 Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1921, 1933 and 1947.
husband and I with our contributions, and my two sons in the home. I really went into the bank to educate my sons.123

Married women in jobs were very defensive. Disapproval of married women working was widespread even among women in the 1930s. The concern was that older married women were taking jobs from young women, as much as unemployed men. The Australasian Women's Association believed married women's employment was unfair to single women. Any woman who was married was, by definition, in comfortable circumstances. It expressed disapproval of the employment of women in comfortable circumstances in competition with single women who are compelled to earn their own living124

During the depression, the 1931 New South Wales legislation banned the employment of married women as teachers. It had its precursor in late nineteenth century regulation in Victoria. The rationale was that young women graduates would be given scarce employment rather than men.

Muriel Heagney concluded there was little new feminization taking place during the depression. She answered criticism of working women in her book, Are Women Taking Men's Jobs? In the 1930s she also tried to support married women's right to employment. The Federated Clerks' Union circulated a petition calling for the alteration of the Commonwealth constitution "to give every woman worker the right to wages at the same rate as a man doing the same work, and the same opportunities for appointments, training and promotion". Nevertheless, the Clerks' Unions' 1938 federal conference was opposed to the employment of married women whose husbands were capable of supporting them in reasonable comfort while there were men and single women who were unemployed. Muriel Heagney's motion not to jeopardize married women's equality was lost.125

123 Female Bank Officers' Case, 6 June 1928, p. 27.
124 Argus, 18 September 1930.
125 ibid., 13 September 1938.
Victorian white collar unions did not organize in opposition to technological or rationalization changes in the interwar period. They were more concerned with controlling entry into the occupations and to oppose the entry of a new group of workers and further heterogeneity. They were opposed to the employment of married women and to part-time employment. While they agitated to exclude married women, they sought to protect single business girls who would leave employment to marry.

6.6 Conclusion: Heterogeneity in Workplaces and Workers

The purpose of this chapter has been to examine the changes in retail and clerical work in the 1920s and 1930s in Victoria. I have examined three propositions. The first was that scientific management resulted in shop and office conditions becoming the same as factory conditions. The second, was that although conditions were better in shops and offices than in factories, the extent of control was the same. Employers achieved this by instituting welfare provisions: white collar workers were bribed by their employers to be bidden. And the third was that arbitration standardized worker conditions and left employers with no incentive or provision to whip or bribe their workers to perform.

Despite scientific management rhetoric, the extent of the implementation of scientific management was very limited as was the extent of welfarism. The latter conclusion is probably more significant because welfarism is usually cited by the human relations school as an alternative to the scientific management movement from the late 1920s. The limits and unevenness in implementation of the two major ideological managerial movements raised two more mundane factors which were also obstacles to homogenized working conditions. The first is the simple matter of size and the other is differentiation within broad labour segments, particularly within the secondary shop and office labour market. Most workers worked in small peripheral
business with secondary labour market conditions. I have argued that even within the parameters established by the dual economic structure and the arbitration system, there was room at the top and the bottom for employers to treat some groups of workers differently: male executives working for the large companies won good conditions; and older, experienced married women and part-time workers did not win good conditions of employment. Workers did not always resist employers' segmentation strategies and when they did resist they were not always successful.
Chapter Seven: 
The Victorian Case Study 1880-1939

In this concluding chapter, I assess the Victorian feminization pattern as a whole for the period 1880-1939 as it has been presented in this thesis. The major arguments are recapitulated. I then consider the Victorian case study in its international context and discuss the wider implications of the Victorian feminization pattern.

7.1 The Victorian Feminization Pattern in Shop and Office Labour

One of the significant developments in the Victorian occupational structure from the late nineteenth century was the feminization of retail and clerical occupations. Significant numbers of women entered shop and office employment. Between the 1880s and the 1930s, the number of female shop assistants increased 26 times from about 840 to 21826 and the number of clerical workers 71 times from 332 to about 23606. In the same period, the number of state-employed teachers doubled, from 2420 to 4593, the number of female factory workers increased six times, from 11027 to 61014, and nurses seven times, from 1061 to about 7890. The number of domestic servants rose from 20515, peaked at 38826 in 1901 and decreased to about 25000 by 1939.¹ The increase in the proportion of women in shop and office work was as significant as the rate of increase. The proportion of female state-employed teachers hovered around 56%. The proportion of factory workers who were women rose from 28%, peaked at 42% in 1909, and dropped to 34% in 1939. The proportion of female shop and office workers, however, rose steadily from the late nineteenth century. Between 1881 and 1939, the

proportion of women shop assistants rose from about 8% to 45%; and women clerks from 3.4% to 55%.

Despite the increasing numbers and the increasing proportion of women employed, it has been argued that shop and office workers became more heterogeneous rather than more homogenized from the nineteenth century. The heterogeneity does not show in the aggregate statistics. Labour sub-markets developed in the expanding shop and office occupations along workplace and worker-attribute lines. Changes in structure and occupational composition within the feminization pattern resulted in the segmentation of the labour market; in diversity rather than uniformity. I have argued that there were three inter-related causes of the segmental process: changes in demand, changes in supply, and influencing both, changes in government services. I will discuss each in turn.

Demand Story

Graph 7-1: Victorian Company Registrations, 1864-1955
Source: R. Keith Yorston, Limited Liability Companies, Sydney, 1956, pp. 188-190
There appear to have been three waves in the formation of companies employing retail and clerical labour in Victoria before 1939, as shown in Graph 7-1. There were qualitative differences involved in these business expansions.

The first substantial employers outside the public service were a small number of British companies facilitating British capital investment. Australian companies formed from the 1850s, although there were few of them. As Davison notes, two or three hundred firms, formed in the 1850s, dominated the Melbourne market up to the 1880s. The public service, banks and mining companies were the largest single employers of clerical labour up to 1881, followed by woolbroking, insurance and shipping businesses. In the 1870s and 1880s commercial clerks were physically concentrated in Flinders Lane working for a number of relatively small merchants and importers. Law clerks and retail shop assistants were large census categories, but these sectors were not physically concentrated. There were several suburban centres, such as Collingwood and Prahran, which competed with the city as the largest retailing centre. By the 1880s, then, there was a small group of local companies which were very nearly alike in size and scope.

Their employees were also very much alike, at least in one respect: they were male. Skilled and supervisory clerical and retail staff were commonly recruited directly from Britain. A secondary labour market for males existed by the 1880s, however, even in these relatively small shops and offices: 10% of Goldsborough, Mort and Company's male staff were temporary males in the 1880s; nearly a third of the Bank of Australasia's employees were supernumeraries earning on average £65 between 1888 and 1891.

---

compared to an average of £229 for Staff Officers. Many in the secondary labour market were boys who had small wages, insecure tenure and few employment prospects once they reached 21.

A second phase in company development began from the 1880s as the tertiary sector servicing the domestic market grew. This meant considerable expansion of office and sales work in larger public utilities, factories and merchant houses. The largest employer called to give evidence in the Clerks' Union Appeal Board case in 1913 was the Melbourne Metropolitan Gas Company which was formed by the amalgamation of three companies in 1877; the clerical staff had grown from about 20 staff to 300. The development of white collar labour hierarchies was based, first, upon the development of outside partnerships in Melbourne from the 1880s but, more importantly, soon after, by joint stock company formation. The three largest privately owned Victorian softgoods "houses", Patterson, Laing and Bruce, Robert Reid and W. D. Murray, for example, turned into public companies with inter-state interests and British offices between 1897 and 1900. These wholesalers usurped the role of commission agents. The scale of employment grew. Control was divorced from ownership; the number of salaried managers increased. The Melbourne softgood companies represented more concentrated, stable, Australian employers, so-called "core employers". Company formation from the late nineteenth century, then, was accompanied by the beginning of market concentration which differed from the traditional pattern.

A third phase of company development started about the time of World War One as a number of companies began to dominate the retail and mercantile sectors. These companies had increasing turnovers and integrated production and marketing. Large diversifying commercial companies also

---

5 Australasian Insurance and Banking Record, 20 December 1900, p. 943.
expanded from their geographic and sector base. Melbourne department stores expanded state-wide, developed mail-order services for the country districts, and then moved interstate. Although the merger movement was a general post-World War Two phenomenon, retail firms registered on the Victorian stock market in order to finance moves to dominate the local retail market. Myer registered as a limited liability company in 1918 at the time it began diversifying into manufacturing by buying the Doveton Woollen Mills at Ballarat. It acquired five other Melbourne companies in the interwar period: Robertson and Moffat in 1922, Stephens and Sons in 1925, Thomas Webb and Sons in 1930, W.H. Rocke and Company in 1931 and Saks in 1938.6

There were significant implications for occupational structure in the pattern of business expansion. First, the newer types of business were growing alongside the older ones. Secondly, feminization was occurring in occupations which were expanding and it interacted with existing patterns rather than replaced them. Less than one in ten people were reported in the broad commerce category in the 1881 census compared to nearly one in five in the 1933 census.7 Most importantly, feminization meant change in, not the end of, male employment. While the proportion of male wage earners who were shop assistants, for example, dropped slightly from 5.5% in 1921 to 5.3% in 1933, the number of male shop assistants increased from 19178 to 22692.8 Male and female employment developed in tandem.

---


7 Only estimates can be made because the census commercial sector is a large heterogeneous sector which is vertically incomparable for the period before 1921. People began to be recorded according to occupations rather than industry from 1891 as a result of conferences of Australian and New Zealand statisticians. The 1920 Imperial conference of statisticians in London recommended the publication of more precise occupational and industrial statistics and led to reconstructions of previous census data. This was not possible for census material prior to 1891. For a summary and analysis of the debate on recording women in the occupational census, see Katrina Alford, 'Colonial Women's Employment as Seen by Nineteenth-Century Statisticians and Twentieth-Century Economic Historians', Labour History, 51, November 1986, pp.1-10. The recording of women's labour in commerce has been less debated than in the case of rural and domestic occupations.

8 CIFR, 1921 and 1933, VPP, Victorian Year Book (VYB), 1933-4, p. 306.
Firm structures were becoming more diverse and, consequently, demand was becoming more diverse: "commercial work offer[ed] a wide scope" of employment for women. In "one-man" businesses, women had the advantage of learning the whole of the routine of business, and as it grows they grow with it, and the opportunity of advancement is often better than with the larger firm.\(^9\)

As my informants told me,

I guess some of the bigger accountancy firms would have been considered better but I liked the variety of work that was offering in a smaller firm.\(^10\)

In small business there was less standardization in actual activities, although this was not necessarily reflected in employment conditions and status. Staff were dumbfounded when one woman left the E. S. and A. Bank in Collins Street and when we heard...she was to take over the head girl's job there [in charge of a pool of 6 typists] ...we thought this particular girl was 'coming down in the world', as we girls all thought of the banks as a sort of superior place to work... She left the bank to come to Dunlops for more money and the senior position- banks didn't pay much in those days.\(^11\)

Limited classifications in industrial awards do not necessarily indicate job content for women. Some women in the largest workplaces like banks were strictly segregated and had standardized jobs. In small workplaces, award payments might be the rule but women often performed a wide range of tasks. This was obvious in 1913 when the clerical award gave equal pay and the Chief Inspector of Factories and Shops was inundated with enquiries from small employers whose workers did some shopwork and some clerical work and the employers were worried that they would have to pay male rates of pay to these women.\(^12\)

\(^9\) Australian Women's Weekly, 9 September 1933.
\(^10\) Janet Marone (pseudonym), Work History, paid employment from 1932.
\(^11\) Mary Bluestone (pseudonym), Work History, paid employment from 1928.
\(^12\) Letters to the Chief Inspector of Factories, PRO, 5466/41.
The relationship between employment conditions and workplace size was not clear-cut. Melbourne-based chain stores, for example, proliferated. Coles grew from three stores in 1924 to 20 stores in 1931 and its sales increased tenfold. Throughout the depression, Coles was in a "sound position". At a time when small businesses were subject to economic restraint, Coles was expanding. At a time of high unemployment, it even employed 200 more staff in 1931 than in 1930. The individual shops were often no larger than traditionally-owned stores but they paid their hands at a higher rate than that prescribed by the award for shop assistants, and in addition the girls are given two weeks' annual holiday in lieu of one fixed by the award, and each girl is given a special privilege of half a day a month off duty for private shopping purposes...

There were 82 Coles stores by 1940 while Oliver Gilpin owned 94 stores in Victoria, New South Wales and Tasmania. Some women in the labour forces of these expanding companies had security of tenure and conditions of employment which were better than those in the secondary labour market in the traditional, small-sized, competitive or peripheral businesses. And yet, there was little difference in the work these women actually performed.

The largest diversifying companies created a new salaried elite or primary labour market. The number of managers or professional salaried executives increased. Myer, with the largest single emporium in Melbourne employing 2500 in 1939, also developed a corporate umbrella structure. There was one manager, Edwin Lee Neil, in the store which Sidney Myer bought in 1911; when both men died in 1934, Myer's nephew, Norman, became one of six board members heading a management structure consisting of seven associate directors; 17 sectional controllers; about 40 group controllers and 13

---

13 *Age*, 13 August 1930 and 19 August 1931. Sales increased from £190,982 to £191,7250 between 1924 and 1931.
14 *Australian Women's Weekly*, 26 August 1933.
150 departmental managers. The managers were specialized and independent from Norman Myer's direct control.\footnote{15}

The 25 major trading banks in 1914, similarly, had been halved by amalgamation to 14 banks by 1939 (coalescing 45 years later into just four major trading banks). This increase in concentration gave these companies higher rates of profit and reduced the risk of failure.\footnote{16} At the same time, core companies, like banks, formalized employment structures and were in a position, for example, to nurture and reward elite workers. The number of managers increased as banks extended their services and developed branch networks.

The implications of firm structure for occupational structure is clear; expanding businesses altered labour market demands. Large companies came to dominate some sectors of the Victorian business economy by 1939. Large companies are usually characterized by a base of standardized mechanized labour, or a female secondary labour market, topped by a small elite, or male primary labour market. The feminization rate increased at the same time that the rate of mechanization of Victorian business increased.

Most studies emphasize that the economic rationality of employing women; feminization is explained by the demand-side of the labour market equation. The association of feminization with large employment units, mechanization and corporate management decisions is emphasized:\footnote{17}

In the era of the Victorian counting house, when the administrative staff of many concerns consisted of fewer than a dozen clerks, it was not terribly economically significant whether these positions were filled by men or women.....The growing clerical labor intensity of industry came from two

\footnote{17} See ibid., pp. 179-180.
The new modern type of firm differentiated between workers' wages and conditions. In particular, the dual labour market division between primary and secondary labour markets, or male and female, allegedly occurred in the modern company. The formation of the internal labour market is closely associated with large core firms that could withstand the pressure of competition and reward their elite male workers. The modern company mechanized to the greatest degree and offered working conditions similar to those of a factory for most of its female employees.

It is understandable that others studying feminization have focused on mechanization and, or, the growing secondary labour market in large enterprises. They have argued that technology and economies of scale resulted in jobs becoming general, insecure, interchangeable and dead-end. I have disagreed with the homogenization thesis. First, big business did not dominate the Victorian labour market. Secondly, even within big business, standardization of female work was not the principal result of commercial expansion in Victoria. Thirdly, feminization was not just the rational strategy of large-scale business.

---

First, most discussions of feminization are based on women's jobs in large companies. Small business, however, remained important for shop and office workers in Victoria. While it has been shown that the average size of employers increased and sectors began to be concentrated, it has also been argued that small employers remained dominant and feminized along with large employers. A major conclusion of this study is that there was a basic dualism in the structure of Victorian shops and offices but with the balance, in labour market terms, going to small business. Small business was not simply going to develop into big business or be taken over by big business. Most women, and indeed most men, were employed in small business before 1939.

Secondly, women's work was not homogeneous. While it was true that there were standardized typists working in typing pools in Melbourne offices, with no on-the-job training and no promotion, they were few in number. In the 1930s when typing pools were created, women were being employed as buyers and private secretaries. Large workplaces offered standard jobs as well as jobs with incentives. There was a low proportion of female retail and clerical pool workers and the division of both the male and female labour markets.

Finally, feminization was not unilinear. Nor was it even, as shown in Table 7-1.

Table 7-1: Feminization of Assistants and Clerks in Selected Retail and Clerical Sectors by %, Victoria, 1881-1933.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1881</th>
<th>1891</th>
<th>1901</th>
<th>1911</th>
<th>1921</th>
<th>1933</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Booksellers</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bootmakers</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butchers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confectioners</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drapery</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Furniture</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grocers</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardware</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bank</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Dept.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postal &amp; telegraph.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Railway</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tramway</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factory</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The feminization pattern varied according to company size, sector and individual employer. The pace of feminization varied for different reasons in different sectors. The state bureaucracy, for example, had one of the lowest feminization ratios, 9%, by the 1930s, despite its employing significant numbers of women in the 1880s and developing into large mechanized clerical offices allegedly conducive to feminization. Enquiries into the public service from the turn of the century recommended feminization.

---

20 Census of Victoria, 1881, 1891, 1901, Census of Australia, 1911, 1921, 1933, Occupations of the People. The census before 1921 include some managerial staff such as bank managers as well as clerks which make the latter increases less dramatic than they were. In 1933 on the basis of returns the CIFR listed only 15,521 commercial clerks, probably mostly metropolitan, of whom 55% were women. However, the CIF returns were only a sample. In the case of retail shops, however, its statutory returns for 1921 and 1933 are better than census data and therefore have used. Railway and tramway clerks in 1933 are for Australia since official figures are not given by state. Factory clerk numbers up to 1911 are from VYRs. The published figures are not disaggregated by sex after 1912. In evidence to Commissioners, the Victorian Statistician stated that there were 2653 female and 3866 male accountants and clerks or 41% women in 1926-7, Minutes of Royal Commission on Child Endowment, Melbourne, 1928, clause 20837.


22 Census of Australia, 1933, Occupations of the People, Tables 18 and 19.
Expansion was minimal, however. The public service took longer to recover than other commercial sectors from policy decisions to retrench during the 1890s and 1930s. The decision to give repatriated servicemen employment preference in the 1920s also affected feminization. Within that overall pattern, the Post Office feminized before the rest of commerce from the 1870s. It underwent rapid expansion at the same time as its budget was constrained. Part of the explanation for its early feminization lies in the fact that salaried women had been employed in British post offices since the seventeenth century. Such precedents facilitated the employment of cheaper female labour rather than male labour in Victoria.

Banks were large, labour-intensive, expanding, clerical employers whose managements were also reluctant to employ women. There was tacit agreement among Melbourne bankers that the proportion of women should not exceed 10% in the interwar period and no bank exceeded this proportion. Some managers had to be forced to employ women. One can follow the debate between Charles Henderson, manager of Melbourne's Bank of Australasia and the London General Managers during World War One. Despite having 150 staff enlisting, he was prepared to employ 14 year old boys and the "fittest pensioners" rather than women. The London directors attempted to point out the fallacies in his "exaggerated" fears of female employment and eventually simply ordered him to employ women. Even when resorting to female labour, bank managers selected middle class and relatively highly educated women.

Business change had important consequences for feminization. We have to acknowledge, however, that while an expanding feminizing business sector developed, the feminization pattern at the level of individual employers,  

whatever their size, was much less uniform. Idiosyncratic competitive pressures, historical peculiarities and irrational business decisions upset a neat pattern. Female labour was not simply recruited to large retail and clerical workplaces or 'factories'.

**Supply Story**

Labour supply was also heterogeneous. This becomes more obvious when one goes beyond the simple story that between 1880 and 1939 shop and office work feminized. Complex trends are subsumed within the aggregate feminization pattern: gender transformation overshadows other qualitative change. Within the steady feminization trend, the commercial labour market experience not only varied over time by gender but by marital status, age, class and educational status. The period 1880 to 1939 was the era of the single business girl and the end of the era of the single business boy. There were progressive waves of women: single, middle-class, privately educated women in the 1880s; younger women at the turn of the century; publicly-educated girls from World War One; and, finally, married women at the end of the interwar period. At the same time, commercial employment among younger males from the 1870s was overtaken by older, higher-educated males in the interwar period. The profile of the business woman and man changed from the 1880s to the 1930s. The change was gradual with recruitment evolving around marital status, age, class origins and merit. The numbers of such people on the job market were beyond employers' control.

The reserve army of shop and office labour was more specific, however. The number of young women with the requisite educational standards grew and competition increased. As indicated in Table 7-2, by the 1930s and 1940s, the era of the single business girl had reached its peak; older, married women began to be employed. The type of male recruited also changed. After the
expansion of boy labour at the end of the nineteenth century, an increasing proportion of older males was recruited.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Female</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0-15</td>
<td>15-24</td>
<td>25-45</td>
<td>45+</td>
<td>0-15</td>
<td>15-24</td>
<td>25-45</td>
<td>45+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>43.9</td>
<td>24.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>40.9</td>
<td>28.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>52.3</td>
<td>33.7</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>31.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>49.9</td>
<td>34.7</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>25.4</td>
<td>44.9</td>
<td>28.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>49.6</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>45.6</td>
<td>33.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>33.2</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>45.2</td>
<td>34.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It was not always the case that females substituted male labour; females also substituted other females. I argued that the most significant causes for the changing profiles of commercial employees were social and educational.

Ideology protected and failed to protect various women's jobs. There was a revolution in shop and office workers between 1880 and 1939. Paid work became respectable for single women and even girls of "good families" did it. The history of women in the Australian workforce can be divided into three periods. First, from 1788 to 1870, it was not respectable to be unmarried or a working woman. Few wage labour opportunities existed. The early colonial economy was dominated by whaling, sealing, pastoral and agricultural labour and public works navvying which put a premium on single male labour or married couples. The economic structure sustained the preponderance of men over women and constrained women's workplace opportunities. There was a great status difference between the married, good wife and mother, and the unmarried. The virtue of unmarried women who worked in paid employment was regarded as questionable.24

Secondly, from the 1870s to the 1930s it became respectable for unmarried women to work. Although the early colonial economy was rural-based, Australia urbanized rapidly. The manufacturing sector began to expand from

---

the 1870s, as did the tertiary sector, including retail and commercial business, from the 1880s and 1890s. The number of women outnumbered men in the population and the number of women who would remain unmarried rose. A dual process which occurred in many countries began in Victoria. A greater number of young unmarried women relied on their own labour power. The demographic transition was toward smaller families but most women left paid employment upon marriage and committed themselves to unpaid domestic labour for their childbearing years. The female commercial labour force was young, mainly under 24 and single. The exclusion of married women from paid employment rigidified. Married women were discouraged from waged commercial employment unless they were widowed or deserted or encumbered with a disabled or non-providing husband.

Thirdly, from the 1930s it became respectable for some married women not directly responsible for the care of young children to be in paid employment alongside young single women.²⁵

The women working in paid shop and office work in this era were not only young, unmarried women but they were relatively educated women. Owing to broad socio-demographic factors, the labour supply of women increased. While socio-demographic changes from the 1880s led to a surplus of women with a propensity to white collar work, they do not explain which women were employed. The sex ratios balanced, the birthrate dropped, the age of marriage at first marriage rose, the number of women permanently unmarried grew. These factors go some way to explaining why there was a general increase in paid labour market participation of young women. But they do not

---

explain why the women drawn into the white collar workforce were drawn from particular social groups.

Access to commercial education is important to my argument. Women flocked to take advantage of commercial education. Families made sacrifices in order that their daughters might be prepared for the labour market. There were fees to pay to send girls to business colleges to acquire commercial skills. Where once employers had been responsible for training, now fully-trained recruits sought employment.

The most striking characteristic of the women entering shops and offices by the 1930s is that, despite operating machines in the largest companies, they were not unskilled, uneducated or unmotivated. Indeed, the largest mechanized offices invariably chose the most able women available. The largest Melbourne offices chose recruits on the basis of the results of competitive tests. Who would like to describe Margaret Emery as unskilled or without any commitment to the workplace? Her father was a guard in the Railways and her mother had been a tailoress before marriage. Margaret left school until in the 8th grade with a Merit Certificate. She won a scholarship to a business college, did a 12 month course in shorthand, typing, English, arithmetic and bookkeeping. She won her jobs, at the Royal Life Savings Society in 1936 and Alcock, Thompson and Taylor in 1938, after competitive tests. When she married she kept on working despite family opposition.26 Her boss was agreeable but her "family thought I shouldn't have done that".27 She left work when she was pregnant. She re-entered the workforce when the youngest of her five children was three. She wanted to 'educate' her sons and daughters. While the bimodal pattern of women's labour

27 Margaret Emery, (pseudonym), Work History, paid employment from 1934.
participation developed, even the married women entering commerce from the 1930s had commercial education and experience.

The accreditation movement also affected men. The mushrooming professional organizations at the end of the nineteenth century controlled accreditation: they certificated their members who were older established men. Recruits to paid shop and office labour from the 1870s were disproportionately young: the expansion of the retail and clerical labour force resulted in the expansion, first, of boy labour in the 1880s. Old taught young. The rise of bigger business resulted in the formation of labour hierarchies and managerial opportunities for a group of ambitious clerks. The enrolments of males in correspondence schools and university courses rose in the interwar period. Men reskilled themselves for the changing labour market outside office hours. The formation of professional associations of male accountants promoted their independence from their firm. Accreditation ensured that males' were attractive to employers. Accredited men prevented unqualified men and all women from enjoying the development of the best primary labour jobs.

I have argued that men and women competed amongst themselves and between the sexes for jobs created by commercial expansion. Education, ideology and workers' associations promoted segmentation. Those winning the privileged positions were educated and experienced men and women. It has been argued, then, that labour supply factors or characteristics of workers played a role in shaping the Victorian feminization pattern.

These developments are contrary to a demand-side deskilling hypothesis. Rather than women being deskilled by managerial strategies, they were not differentially skilled as a result of their educational decisions. Because increasing numbers of girls could bookkeep in 1935, bookkeeping was not
much of a bargaining point. Even if bookkeeping was skilled, once that skill has become widespread, the workforce has, in effect, been deskillled. Skill does not depend on the degree of difficulty of the job so much as who else can do it.

Third, Contingent, Story: The Role of the Government
The State played a crucial role in the Victorian feminization process. I am not referring here to government bureaucrats' roles as legislator or employer. I have argued that the government was not responsible for effective protective labour legislation which applied to the majority of commercial employers. I have also argued that while there were large numbers of clerical and counter staff in government offices, particularly in the railways and post offices, the larger, unregulated private sector did not follow the government feminization pattern. It is the Government's role in arbitration and education that concerns me. It was crucial to the character of the developing sexual division of labour in Victorian shops and offices. In a country with so little large-scale business, the state played an inordinate role in the facilitation of award scales of pay based on age differentiation as much as gender or skill. The State's role, moreover, in providing education facilitated the transition from a labour market in which the oldest, experienced staff tutored the young recruits to one in which general and specialized skills were acquired through mass education.

First, the institutionalization of arbitration was important for labour market segmentation. A collective bargaining system was instituted in Australian states earlier than in the rest of the world. Award structures based on gender and age differentials contributed to the era of the young, single, business woman. Unions were concerned with keeping the white Australia policy and married women out of employment. At the same time, arbitration contributed to worker divisions as the example of equal pay showed. The arbitration
system thwarted unions' attempts to represent all workers and organize them into a politically homogeneous force.

Secondly, the State played a significant part in making shop and office work mainstream women's occupations by 1939. I have showed how the State helped to reshape the reserve army of female shop and office labour. In 1880, it was far from the case that every average woman was a possible substitute for male shop and office labour. For women there were various obstacles to overcome: discrimination not only on the basis of gender but on marital status, age, economic status and education. In 1880, the few women working as shop and office workers were married and/or over 25, middle class women in small shops and country post offices. The women working in Victoria's shops and offices in the 1880s were a marginal, well-educated middle class elite. The educated working women entering shop and office work did so out of economic necessity and against prevailing occupational stereotyping. They were joined by their humbler sisters as skills became general and accessible with the rise of business colleges and secondary schools. Education curricula were based on the fact that a growing number of girls would go into shop and office employment before they married. Universal, free, secondary education gave working class girls new employment opportunities from World War One. This was accompanied by an evolving ideology which reflected the democratization of women's recruitment ensuring that supply outweighed demand for labour throughout this period. It has been argued that by 1939 few groups of women would have been dismissed from consideration by employers. Changes in job structure and family economy had occurred but, most significantly, the State provided educational institutions which provided shop and office recruits.

The State's role was crucial and ambiguous, then. The State provided crucial structures which helped to undermine the homogeneity of the labour market.
The arbitration system encouraged groups of workers to seek finely-graduated pay-scales and to attempt to win better pay and benefits for separate groups of workers. Arbitration promoted heterogeneity. Some educational facilities also created highly skilled and educated shop and office workers. Mass commercial education was a force for homogeneity not heterogeneity, however. The transition from firm-specific to firm-general skills rested on the state’s provision of general education. And yet, the type of woman recruited by 1939 had become more heterogeneous since girls from a wider socio-economic background had access to gain educational pre-requisites for shop and office employment.

7.2 The Victorian Feminization Pattern: Integrative Explanation; International Setting

The commercial sector in Australian states was not proportionately smaller than in other North American or Western European industrial countries; Victoria did not have a conspicuously later urban workforce pattern or a lower proportion of its workforce in commerce. Melbourne acquired an urban occupational structure by the 1850s when 'commerce, trade and manufacturing' accounted for a larger proportion of the workforce than agriculture. In addition to urban drift, a high proportion of immigrants stayed in the cities: 27%, 32% and 42% of Victoria's population was resident in Melbourne in 1871, 1881 and 1891 respectively. Over half the population was Melburnian by 1939. Urban commerce was an important sector early in Victoria's development. The occupational structure reflected a commercial-

---

28 In 1880, 7% of the United States and 4% of the German 'occupied' population were recorded as commercial. By 1930, the proportions had grown to 15% and 12% respectively and thereafter grew “only modestly”. Jurgen Kocka, White-Collar Workers in America 1890-1940, London, 1980, pp. 16-18. Australia’s commerce sector grew from 9% in 1881 to 16% in 1933. Census of the Commonwealth, 1911, 1921 and 1933, Occupations of the People, Tables 3.
bureaucratic economy at least up until 1870 when the manufacturing sector competed for significance.  

Commercial feminization followed the overseas pattern. The feminization of clerical and sales occupations in Britain was 5.5% in 1891, 17.5% in 1911 and 36% in 1931. The comparable ratios in Canada were 10.0%, 22.5% and 34%. The Australian ratios were about 7%, 18% and 37%. The distribution was different in Victoria compared to the most advanced economy, the United States, however.

Table 7-3: Comparative Feminization Estimates, 1891, 1911 and 1931

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Clerks</th>
<th></th>
<th>Shop Assistants</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c.1891</td>
<td>c.1911</td>
<td>c.1931</td>
<td>c.1891</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>15.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>40.2</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Feminization of shop and office work was slower to develop in Victoria than in the United States but the pattern was similar by the 1930s.

Since the feminization experience was common to western economies, the Victorian case study has been used to test "global propositions". In this way, the Victorian case study acts as a control group for other feminization studies.

---

34 Alba M. Edwards, Comparative Occupation Statistics for the United States, 1870 to 1930, Part of the Sixteenth Census of the United States 1940, Washington, 1943, pp. 110-12, 127-29; Census of Victoria 1891, and Census of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1911 and 1933; I tried to use the same categories as Edwards above for clerks and I used the CIFR categories to calculate shop assistants in 1891. Broom and Jones, eds., Opportunity and Attainment in Australia, give figures for Australia, clerical workers: 1911, 13%; 1933, 34% and shop assistants: 1911, 23%; 1931, 40%.
Because the expansion of shop and office jobs has been so widespread and because similarities and differences have occurred in its development, the comparative approach tests the alleged inevitabilities and predictions of other accounts. This comparative framework has been used for two purposes. Variables identified in other accounts, particularly what was identified as the standard account were tested in the Victorian case study. The Victorian case study also calls into question the common version of the segmentation approach.

Variable Feminization Explanation

I have offered neither a supply-side nor demand-side explanation of feminization. I have offered an integrative explanation. That is, I have suggested that both supply and demand, and a third mediating group of variables, explain the feminization pattern. Graham Lowe has defined an integrated approach as "an empirically grounded approach sensitive to historical contingencies" in which supply and demand factors combine in different ways, thereby explaining more comprehensively than previous studies, how, when and why women entered the office.35

This study has attempted to answer these questions. It has also tried to explain which women entered white collar employment.

Put provocatively, the conclusion of this thesis is that there is no such thing as feminization. Rather, there are feminizations. There is no unitary phenomenon with a single explanation. So the most significant explanatory variable depends on the question you ask; the feminization that concerns you. If, for instance, the question is why were women employed in Victoria in the 1880s, one would be hard-pressed to explain it in terms of the adoption of machinery and 'routine production techniques'. When I try to explain, for example, the recruitment of larger numbers of women from more humble

35 Lowe, Women in the Administrative Revolution, p. 23.
backgrounds to shop and office work in the 1920s, my explanation has been in terms of educational changes from 1910. I explain the hosts of younger women entering shops and offices at the turn of the century in terms of economic expansion. Rather than choosing between demand and supply explanations to see which perspective provided "a better explanation", the interaction has been plotted historically. The starting presumption for the feminization explanation has been that causes have their precise effects only in the context of each other; to base an explanation upon the demand or the supply side is to ignore that significant changes took place on both sides.

Some might suggest this leads to an unweighted list of variables. Historians of feminization proposing an integrative perspective in the past, such as Margery Davies and Alice Kessler-Harris, have been criticized for offering unweighted lists:

In the interest of maintaining an integrated perspective, they incorporate as many variables as they can into their explanations, without attempting to test particular theories with an eye to disconfirmation so that a simpler, more parsimonious explanation can be extracted.36

The variables given in this thesis have not been unweighted: they have been tested in a comparative context. Variables have been tied to aspects of the process and I have used an historically-specific weighting.

There are many candidate causes for the nature and pattern of retail and clerical feminization: technological change, size of firm, competitive pressures in labour-intensive industries, scientific management, labour shortages of the First World War, changing demographic balances of men and women, sexist stereotyping, protective labour legislation, genteel aspirations and increasing women's education. The conclusion of the thesis is that some of these variables were not important at all in the feminization process in Victoria or were not important at the time that they are said to have been. I focused

explicitly upon particular variables in Chapters 2 to 6. I shall summarize each chapter and outline my argument.

1. Graeme Davison, Gail Reekie and Samuel Cohn have said that feminization began in earnest from the 1880s because it was economically rational for employers to recruit women. Feminization was a result of employers' strategies to rationalize or deskill their workplaces. I argued instead that the social changes in the 1880s placed pressure on some relatively well-educated, young, single women to find relatively good shop and office jobs.

2. Coral Chambers, Desley Deacon and Alice Kessler-Harris have said that feminization occurred at the turn of the century because governments intervened in the labour market to restrict women's hours or to ensure they were a cheap supply of unskilled labour making them attractive to employers. Women's paid labour position deteriorated at the turn of the century as a result of government intervention. I argued that the government's intervention in relation to protective labour legislation and arbitration was of no importance to shop and office occupations at this time. Some young, single women and ambitious men both profitted from the administrative-retail revolution at the turn of the century.

3. Melanie Raymond, Edna Ryan and Heidi Hartman have said that feminization occurred as a result of a 'male compact' in arbitration forums.


Men ensured, for patriarchal reasons, that women's wages be kept low and were attractive to employers.\textsuperscript{39} I approached this variable by examining the equal pay issue and I argued that class as much as gender explains women's pay. I argued that 'sexism' alone would not explain women's employment or the conditions of women's employment.

4. Ian Turner, William Sinclair and Gregory Anderson have said that feminization occurred because employers used the economic crisis of the First World War when there was a male shortage to exploit the industrial reserve army of female labour. Educated middle class women were lured from their domestic duties.\textsuperscript{40} I argued that the war did not influence the trend of commercial feminization in Victoria. More important than the war was the State's provision of secondary education which enlarged the supply of suitably qualified female labour for shop and office work. Young women from a more diverse socio-economic background began to be recruited to shop and office work from the war.

5. Jill Matthews, Gail Reekie and Harry Braverman have said that feminization occurred in the interwar period because employers used women who were secondary labour workers already in their schemes to create rationalized, mechanized shop and office factories.\textsuperscript{41} I argued that there


were few large corporate entities implementing Taylorite rationalizations in interwar Victoria. Victorian commerce was characterized by small business and yet feminization occurred.

Of the variables which were found to be inappropriate to the Victorian experience, the most important was the rationalization and factorization of business employment. Victorian commerce was characterized by small business and yet feminization occurred. Feminization is usually associated with large corporations in overseas studies. Overseas studies should not be taken as models of the Australian experience. Indeed, it may be that these studies, by focusing on the most advanced sectors of the commercial world in Britain and North America have distorted what happened in the Northern hemisphere as well. At any rate, the Victorian experience suggests that overseas models need to be modified. I have argued that a segmental model is the most useful to employ in describing and explaining shop and office feminization. I will now explain how I think the segmental model needs to be modified.

Segmentation With a Difference: Less Emphatic Rise of Corporate Segmentation

The Victorian case study shows that segmentation varied between countries. In the only comprehensive historical study of segmentation, that of Gordan, Edwards and Reich, it is contended that capitalism in the United States suffered three major crises which "resulted in three major structural changes in the organization of work and the structure of labor markets".42 The initial proletarianization from 1820 to the 1890s was the period of the development of wage labour in which workers made wage gains without the productivity per worker rising. Employers reacted by introducing labour-saving and

productivity-enhancing machinery. The homogenization period from the 1870s to 1945 was the period in which a single common or homogeneous labour force was created. Large consolidated firms mechanized and implemented the drive system but also provoked worker opposition. The segmentation era started to dawn from the 1920s as employers decided they had to counter organized opposition. Unions were recognized, workers grievances procedures were implemented and seniority rules were developed. Primary and secondary jobs were distinguished. The privileged primary market was further divided on the basis of the degree of skill and job control into "independent" and "subordinate" primary segments. The employer-union accord really developed nationally in the aftermath of the Second World War.

Segmentation is associated with control in Gordon's, Edwards' and Reich's account as a counter-reaction to workers' opposition to Taylorism. Labour reacted to coercive management policies with higher rates of labour turnover and informal work group organization. Employers in turn moved to differentiate between workers' tasks and fragment informal work organization by "minutely subdivid[ing] jobs...[with] systematic lines of promotion" and channelling groups of workers into specific tasks. Women, for example, were segregated into specific categories of work. Systematizing collective bargaining was the crucial phase in segmentation for Gordon, Edwards and Reich.

In Victoria corporate business and the post World-War Two accord between large business and unions are not so crucial to the segmentation process. The development of secondary and service sectors in Victoria after 1870 was characterized by the strength of labour intensive, small business. The

43 ibid., p. 173.
44 ibid. pp. 186-89.
belated rise of large department stores and large clerical staffs occurred amid a continuing mass of small enterprise. The development of the large bureaucratized office and shop was uneven and protracted. Nonetheless, the average factory office of 12 feminized, while the wholly white collar sectors of banking and public service had lower feminization rates than overall. The Victorian case study has disconfirmed the association of feminization with rationality and size. Small and traditional employers also decided to employ women.

Differences as well as similarities are apparent in the evolution of managerial hierarchies in Western economies, particularly in the periods at which large corporate units dominating the economy emerged. Development varied between countries and varied within occupations. In the United States, the capitalist leader, for instance, family capitalism was superseded by managerial capitalism by 1939. Family capitalism was characterized by members of business owner's families dominating top-level management decisions and it persisted in distribution longer than in the other sectors. Family capitalism still characterized Australian private sector business in 1939.

A second difference between the countries is also apparent. Collective bargaining, the "unusual collective political intervention" or "industrial accord" did not develop in the United States until after the 1930s depression. Collective bargaining which modified "working class militancy" was implemented in Australasian states from the late 1890s. Minimum wage, safety, health and welfare issues were also contested within political-industrial institutions. Small firms did not need personnel departments when they had centralized wage fixing.

The implications of workplace sizes and employer innovation have been hinted at by some Australian historians but not fully drawn out. Gail Reekie in her study of Sydney's big stores' labour relations concluded there was a difference in the Australian development in shop control compared with that in America. Reekie does not draw out the material difference in enterprise and management but describes its effects. Women working in Australian shops did not experience as much alienation from management and did not develop the longstanding distinct culture which Susan Porter Benson has discovered among American women working in vast department stores dating from the turn of the century.

The development of a segmented labour market in Victoria during this period occurred with significant differences from the North American model. The particular feminization pattern in Victoria had two features which contrast to that described in overseas studies: feminization without the emphatic rise of corporate segmentation and earlier heterogeneity.

7.3 Conclusion
Most feminization studies emphasize homogenization. The Victorian case study has proved to be more than an interesting empirical example that does not fit the general homogenization model. The homogenization theories have been found to be deficient. One of the reasons homogenization theories have been so popular is because women's labour market experience has been studied in isolation from men's. The simple fact that most shop and office workers came to be women has overshadowed all other differences and

trends. The aggregate feminization statistic conceals as much as it reveals, however. The entry of women in large numbers into white collar labour was not a unitary phenomenon with a single explanation. The effects of ideological changes in respectability, government intervention, women's education or union activity are not perturbations on a basic demand-side or supply-side curve. Variety and segmentation are essential parts of the process; not merely empirical dust in the eyes of a general model.
### Select Bibliography

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Abbreviations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AA</td>
<td>Australian Archives, Canberra and Melbourne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABL</td>
<td>Archives of Business and Labour, Canberra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANU</td>
<td>Australian National University, Canberra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APP</td>
<td>Australian Parliamentary Papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCAE</td>
<td>Canberra College of Advanced Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NLA</td>
<td>National Library of Australia, Canberra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRO</td>
<td>Public Records Office, Victoria, Melbourne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSSS</td>
<td>Research School of Social Sciences, ANU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SLV</td>
<td>State Library of Victoria, Melbourne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UOMA</td>
<td>University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UOM</td>
<td>University of Melbourne.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VPP</td>
<td>Victorian Parliamentary Papers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Contents

**Part I : Archival Sources**

1. Arbitration Records
2. Dictionaries and Directories
3. Education Records
4. Employers Records
5. Newspapers and Journals
6. Official and Parliamentary Papers
7. Pamphlets, Articles and Books
8. Personal and Society Papers
9. Trade Union Records
10. Work Histories

**Part 2 : Non-Archival Works Cited in the Text**

**PART 1 : ARCHIVAL SOURCES (with locations)**

1. **Arbitration Records**
   - Argus Law Reports, 1912-1921, ANU.
   - Commonwealth Arbitration Reports, 1906-1939, ANU.
   - Industrial Appeals Court, Transcripts and Judgements, 1914-1939, PRO
   - Royal Commission on the Basic Wage, Reports, Submissions and Correspondence, Prime Ministers' Office, AA, A460, 1919-1922.
   - Victoria Labour and Industry Department, Summary of Wages and Conditions fixed by Wages Boards or by Court of Industrial Appeals, 1918-39, SLV and CIF Reports, 1909-1918.
   - Wages Board Minutes and Records, History Files of Conciliation and Arbitration Boards, PRO, 5466/41, 42, 43.

2. **Dictionaries and Directories**
   - The "Digest" Year Book of Public Companies of Australia and New Zealand for 1939, Jobson's Publications Pty. Ltd., Sydney, 1939, ABL.
   - Nairn, Bede, and Serle, Geoffrey, eds., Australian Dictionary of Biography, 7-


Sands and McDougall Melbourne and Suburban Directories 1881-1933, SLV.

Smith, James, ed., The Cyclopaedia of Victoria, 1-3, Cyclopaedia Company, Melbourne, 1903, 1904, 1905.

Sutherland, Alexander, Victoria and Its Metropolis Past and Present, 1-2, McCarron, Bird and Co., Melbourne, 1888, ANU.

Who's Who in the World of Women, 2, Reference Press Association, Melbourne, 1934, SLV.

3. Education Records


4. Employer's Records


Ball and Welch, 1888-1911, UOMA.

Bright and Hitchcocks Pty Ltd., 1882-1939, UOMA.

Coles Myer Archives, 1911-1939, Melbourne.


Commonwealth of Australia, AA, G27/34, CSR A2.

Dalgety Records, Victorian branch, ABL, 100/1/25/1.

Elders, Reports on the Work Done by the Lady Staff, ABL, z 220/190.

Foy and Gibson Ltd., 1902-1931, UOMA.

Oliver Gilpin, c. 1920-1939, SLV, MS 11964.


Melbourne City Council, Permanent Register of Servants, 1900-1939, Melbourne.

Moran and Cato Papers, 1882-1939, SLV, MS 10325.

Mutual Store Ltd., 1870-1914, UOMA.


Paterson, Laing and Bruce, 1876-1939, ABL, 38, N29.

Permewan Wright, 1904-7, SLV.

Post Office, Victoria: AA, 1850-1900, MP 311; and 1901-1939, CP, 78/1, CSR A428.

- Regulations Relating to the Employment of Telegraph Messengers, Letter Carriers, Stampers, Sorters, Female Assistants, Line Repairers, Etc., Approved by the Governor in Council, 5 March 1883, NLA.

Robert Reid and Company, 1879-1939, ABL, 81.

State Bank of Victoria Archives, 1890-1939, Melbourne.

5. Newspapers and Journals

**Age**, and index 1892-99, ANL.

**Argus**, and index 1910-1939, ANL.

**Australasian Medical Congress. Transactions**, sessions 1-11, 1887-1920, (sessions 1-6, 1887-1902 issued as intercolonial Medical Congress of Australasia), ANU.

**Australasian Municipal Officers Journal**, Melbourne, 1924, SLV.

**Australian Insurance and Banking Record**, 1887-1939, ANU.

**Australian Women's Weekly**, 1933-39, ANL.

**Bank Notes**, The Monthly Staff Journal of the Commonwealth Bank of Australia, 1921-1940, SLV.

**The Clerk**, Melbourne, 1911-12, SLV.

**The Clerk**, Melbourne, 1917-18, ANL.

**Colesanco**, Coles' Staff Journal, Melbourne, 1928-39, SLV.

**Federal Public Service Journal**, 1919-1923, ANL.


**Helen's Weekly**, 1927-28, ML.


**New Idea**, 1900-1907, SLV.

**Service**, Foy's Staff News, 1936-50 (formerly **All Shoulders to the Wheel**, 1936+), Melbourne, UOMA.

**Shop Assistants of Australia**, Melbourne, 1919-39, SLV (1929-35 imp.).

**Toscin**, Melbourne 1897-1906, thereafter **Labor Call**, NLA.

**Woman's Sphere**, 1900-09, thereafter, **Woman Voter**, Melbourne, 1909-1919, SLV.

6. Official and Parliamentary Papers, ANU and NLA (unless stated otherwise).

**Australian Parliamentary Papers**


- Report of the Public Service Commissioner and the Public Service Board, 1904-1938.


- Returns to Orders of the Senate:
  - Females employed in Federal Departments, 30th August, 1901, **APP**, 1901-2, 1.
  - Female Telephone Operators (Papers in Connexion with Circular to Probationers), 18th July 1901, **APP**, 1901-2, 1.
  - Postal Department, Victoria: Attendance of Employees, **APP**, 1901-2, 1.
  - Post and Telegraph Department, (Particulars re Officers, Salaries, Etc.), 12 December, 1905, **APP**, 1905, 2.

- Royal Commission on Postal Services, 1910, **APP**, 1910, 4 and 5.

- Royal Commission on Public Service Administration, 1919-1920
  - First Progress Report of the Royal Commission Appointed to Consider and Report Upon Public Expenditure of the Commonwealth With a View to
-Postmaster-General's Review and Remarks on First Progress Report of the Federal Economy Commission in so far as it Relates to the Postal Department, 1919, APP, 1917-1919, 5.
-Remarks by the Auditor-General and Certain Officers of his Staff on First Progress Report of the Federal Economy Commission in so far as it Relates to the Audit Office is Concerned, 1919, APP, 1917-1919, 5.
-Royal Commission on Child Endowment, Report, APP, 1929, 2, and Minutes of Evidence, 1928, [published separately].
-Statement showing, so far as the Department of the Postmaster-General is concerned, the Number of Persons, Male and Female, in the Professional, Clerical, and General Divisions, respectively, who have been Three Years in the Service, have attained the Age of 21 Years, and have been provided for on the Draft Estimates for 1901-2 at a Salary of Less than £110 per annum; and Amount required to increase the Salaries of such Officers to £110 per annum each, APP, 1901-2, 2.
Census of the Commonwealth 1911, 1921, 1933.
Census of Victoria. 1854, 1857, 1861, 1871, 1881, 1891, 1901.
Victoria Government Gazette.
-Licences Issued at Receipt and Pay Offices, 1860s.
-Lists of Public Service permanent and temporary employees: 1901, 14, 29 January 1902; 1911, 17, 27 January 1912.
Victorian Parliamentary Papers
-Education Reports of the Minister of Public Instruction, 1881-2 to 1938-9.
-Report of J. Wallace Ross, Esq. (AICA, AAIS, ACAA of Wilson Ross and Company, Public Accountants) who was appointed a Board of Inquiry to Inquire into the Methods in the Public Service, 1926, VPP, 1927, 2.
-Report of the Post Office and Telegraph Department, 1881-1900.
-Report of the Public Service Board, 1883-1901.
-Report of the Public Service Reclassification Board, 1900, VPP, 1900, 3.
-Report of the Public Service Commissioner, 1902-1939.
-Reports (Interim and Final) of the Board of Inquiry into Certain Matters Concerning the Education Department, 1931, VPP, 1931.
-Returns to Orders of the House:
-A Return showing the differences (if any) between the clerical duties performed by Male and Female Assistants, or Officers in the Postal
Department, respectively, and the differences in salaries paid for such work (if any) ranging from the lowest salary up to £350 per annum, 3 August 1887, VPP, 1887, 1, C10.

- A Return showing the names of every officers and employees holding office in the Railway Department at the time of the passing of The Victorian Railways Commissioners Act 1883 (passed 1st November, 1883) within the meaning of section 72 of such Act, VPP, 1886, 1, C3.
- Continuation and Agricultural High Schools-Return to an Order of 28 July 1909, VPP, 1909, 1, C9.

-Royal Commission of Employees in Shops, Reports and Evidence, 1882-84.
- Second Progress Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Best Means of Regulating and Shortening the Hours of Employees in Shops and Wholesale and Retail Trading Establishments, Etc., together with the first portion of the Minutes of Evidence, 1883, VPP, 1883, 2.
- Final Report, Courts of Conciliation with Minutes of Evidence, 1884, VPP, 1884, 3.


-Victorian Statistical Register, 1871-1911.
Victorian Year Book, 1898-1939.

7. Personal and Society Papers
Muriel Heagney Papers, c1919-1939, SLV, MS 9106.
Melbourne Young Women's Christian Association, 1882-1939, UOMA.
National Short Hours League, 1870-72, SLV.
Samuel Mauger Papers, includes Anti-Sweating League Minutes, 1895-1910, NLA, MS 403.

8. Pamphlets, Articles, Books
Ackerman, Jessie, Australia From a Woman's Point of View, Cassell Australia, Melbourne, 1981; first published 1913, ANU.
Anderson, George, Fixation of Wages in Australia, Melbourne, 1973, first published 1929, ANU.
Armstrong, L. L., 'The Commercial Woman', Australian Highway, 1/2, April 1919, pp. 11-12 and 1/3, May 1919, pp. 11-12.
Beaney, James George, Dr. Beaney's Vindication with Reflections on the Inquest Held Upon the Body of Mary Lewis, Melbourne, 1870, NLA.
Booth, A. J. Mrs, The Payment of Women's Work, Pritchard Brothers, Adelaide, 1919, SLV.


Cramond and Dickson, *Our First Century of Years*, Cramond and Dickson, Melbourne, 1955, David Dickson, Warrnambool.


Dyson, Edward, *F'ctry 'Ands*, George Robertson, Melbourne, 1906, NLA.


Finn, Edmund, *The Chronicles of Early Melbourne, 1835 to 1852: historical, anecdotal and Personal*, by 'Garryowen', 1, Fergusson and Mitchell, Melbourne, 1888, ANU.


Gough, Evelyn, *Non-Represented...Female Labour*, Spectator Publishing Company, Melbourne, 1901, SLV.


_____________, ed., *Making the Office Pay*, A. W. Shaw, Chicago, 1918, SLV.


MacRobertson, (MacPherson Roberston), *A Young Man and a Nail Can. An Industrial Romance*, Melbourne, 1921, MUA.


McClelland, Frank, *Office Training and Standards*, A.W. Shaw, Chicago, 1920, SLV.

McGowan, Henrietta, C., and Cuthbertson, Margaret, G., *Woman's Work,*
Thomas C. Lothian, Melbourne, 1913, SLV.
Moran and Cato, Hints to Better Salesmanship, Fitzroy, nd., Coles-Myer Archives.
Murphy, H. M., Wages and Prices in Australia: Our Labour Laws and Their Effects: also, a report on how to prevent strikes, George Robertson, Melbourne, 1917, SLV.
Myer, A Little Story of a Big Success, Myer, Melbourne, 1934, Coles-Myer Archives.
Pearson, Charles H., The Higher Culture of Women, Samuel Mullen, Melbourne, 1875, SLV.
Piddington, A. B., The Next Step. A Family Basic Income, Macmillan, Melbourne, 1921, ABL.
Sadleir, John, Recollections of a Victorian Police Officer, G. Robertson, Melbourne, 1913.
Taylor, H. D'Esterre, 'Something to do for our boys', Victorian Review, 24/9, 1884, pp. 394-403, ANL.
Twopenny, R. E. N., Town Life in Australia, E. Stock, London, 1883, ANU.
Walpole, Robert S., The True Basis of the Living Wage And Other Articles on Australian Industrial Legislation, Victorian Employer's Federation, Melbourne, 1905, ML.
Wood, Susan Nugent, Woman's Work in Australia, Samuel Mullen, Melbourne, 1862, CCAE.
Zercho, F. W., The Story of Zercho's 1906-1933. Twenty-seven years of unprecedented progress, G. W. Green and Sons, Melbourne, 1933, UOMA.

9. Trade Union Records
Australian Insurance Staff's Federation, Executive, 1920-1939, ABL, E98.
Australian Third Division Telegraphist and Postal Clerks' Union, Executive Council and Branches, 1925-1939, ABL, E142.
Federated Clerks' Union of Australia, Victorian Branch, 1910-13, SLV, MS 11459.
McDonald G. Collection, newspaper clippings on shop assistants and grocers, 1908-1911, ABL, P94/33/9.
Minutes of the Women's Industrial Convention, convened by the VTHC, 23-25 September, 1913, MUA.
Shop Assistants' and Warehouse Employees' Federation of Australia, Victoria, 1918-41, and before amalgamation, 1900-18, United Grocers' Employees Union and Shop Assistants' Union, ABL, T21.

10. Work Histories
Australian Secretarial Papers, CCAE Archives.
Women Shop and Office Workers Histories, 97 interview transcripts and work history scripts from women working in shops and offices before 1939, in the author's possession.
PART 2: NON-ARCHIVAL WORKS CITED IN THE TEXT


Bean, C. E. W., ed., The Official History of Australia in the War, 1914-1918, 11, Ernest Scott, Australia During the War, University of Queensland Press in association with the Australian War Memorial, St Lucia, Queensland, 1936.


Beer, Jane, Fahey, Charles, Grimshaw, Patricia and Raymond, Melanie, Colonial Frontiers and Family Fortunes: Two Studies of Rural and Urban Victoria, History Department, University of Melbourne, Parkville, Melbourne, 1989.


___________, Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers and Customers in American Department Stores, 1890-1940, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1986.


Bevege, Margaret, James, Margaret, and Shute, Carmel, eds., Worth Her Salt, Women at Work in Australia, Hale and Ironmonger, Sydney, 1982.
Boon, Trudy and Jones, Angela, 'Aspects of Female Clerical Workers in Australia', Woman's Sociological Bulletin, 1/3, January 1979, pp. 41-52.
Carroll, Lindsay, Held Cover 1849-1949: The Victorian Insurance Company Limited, Melbourne, 1949.


---


---


---


Canadian Labour History Conference, Sydney University, December 1988.


Hall, Catherine, 'The butcher, the baker, the candelstickmaker: the shop and the family in the Industrial Revolution', in Elizabeth Whitelegg, ed., The Changing Experience of Women, M. Robertson in association with the Open University, Oxford, 1982.


Kessler-Harris, Alice, Degrees of Liberation: A Short History of Women in the University of Melbourne, University of Melbourne and Women's Graduates Centenary Committee, Melbourne, 1985.


Kiddle, Margaret, Caroline Chisholm, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1950.


Nicol, W., 'Women and the Trade Union Movement in New South Wales, 1890-1900', Labor History, 36, May 1979, pp. 18-30.


Ranald, Patricia, 'Feminism and Class: A Study of Two Sydney Women's Organizations During the Depression and War Years 1919-1949', unpublished BA (Hons), University of Adelaide, 1980.


Ryan, Edna, Two-Thirds a Man: Women and Arbitration in New South Wales


____________, 'Class Boundaries in Advanced Capitalist Societies', *New Left Review*, 98, pp. 3-41.

Yorston, R. Keith, *Limited Liability Companies in Australia, some aspects of control: a study of the development, control, and management of limited liability companies in Australia including an outline of the functions of a board of directors*, Law Book Co. of Australasia, Sydney, 1956.


